

THE WHEELS
OF IND



THE OLD *SHIKARI* OF KIONGHARA.

THE WHEELS OF IND

By
JOHN W. MITCHELL
A.M.Insr.T., M.I.T.A.



LONDON
THORNTON BUTTERWORTH, LIMITED

First Published 1934

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

To

The Old *Shikari* of Khongsara—a humble
representative of India's peasant
millions—*Salaam !*

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I EAST TO CALCUTTA	15
II BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT	29
III LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT	91
IV JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS	129
V CAMEOS OF THE WILD	166
VI BHOJUDIH—BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS .	211
VII KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS	247

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
The Old <i>Shikari</i> of Khongsara <i>Frontispiece</i>	
Interior of Dining Car—Bengal-Nagpur Railway . . .	18
Interior of First-Class Compartment—East Indian Railway . . .	18
The Victoria Terminus Station in Bombay of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway	26
Howrah Station. The Calcutta Terminus of the Bengal-Nagpur and East Indian Railways	26
'M' Class 'de Glehn' Compound Express Passenger Locomotive, Bengal-Nagpur Railway	44
1,650-ton Coal Train hauled at 8 m.p.h. by two 'Consolidation' type Bengal-Nagpur Railway Locomotives on 1% grade	44
2,063-ton Coal Train hauled at 15 m.p.h. by one Beyer-Garratt Locomotive on 1% grade	44
Gopurams at the Temple of Minakshi	46
Where the 'Iron Way' cuts through 'no man's land' on to the 'edge of the beyond'	46
The 'Monkey Bridge' between Bilaspur and Katni	88
The 'Bridge of Silver' on the Jharia Chord Line between Bhojudih and Mohuda	88
Wooded Park-lands in the Central Provinces	134
Typical Jungle Country in the Central Provinces	168
The District Headquarters Traffic Staff at Bhojudih, 1923	212
Malkhera Colliery	220
The Giant Coal Quarry at Bermo	220
A Shrine on a Railway	226
Part of the Blast Furnace Plant at the Jamshedpur Works of the Tata Iron & Steel Co.	240
The Gorumahisani Iron Mine	240

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
Street Scene at Puri	264
The Lion Gate at the South Entrance to the Temple of the Lord Jagannath	278
The God moves on his Journey	294
The Rath Jatra of the Lord Jagannath at Puri	294
The Temple of Jagannath at Puri—East Front	300
The Entrance to the Garden Temple at Puri	300

MAPS

	PAGE
A Sketch Map of the Bilaspur Traffic District	28
A Sketch Map of the Bhojudih Traffic District in the Coal- fields area	210
A Sketch Map of the Khurda Road Traffic District	246
A Sketch Map of the Railways of India, 1933	end of book

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

IT is with pleasure that I take this opportunity of acknowledging with grateful thanks my indebtedness to the following gentlemen for information and assistance so freely given :

V. E. D. Jarrad, Esq., the Agent in India, Bengal-Nagpur Railway ; The Secretary, The Bengal-Nagpur Railway Company, Limited ; The High Commissioner for India, London ; The Manager, The Indian Railways Publicity Bureau, London ; The Secretary, The Institute of Transport ; The Managing Director and Editor, *Modern Transport* ; The Editor, *The Railway Gazette* ; The Editor, *The Indian State Railways Magazine* ; The Managing Director, The North British Locomotive Company, Limited, Glasgow ; The Manager of the Gorton Foundry of Messrs. Beyer, Peacock and Company, Limited ; The London Director, Messrs. Tata, Limited ; and the late Mr. C. P. Howard, the late representative in India for The Superheater Company, Limited.

To Mr. J. B. Nicholson, M.A., my especial thanks are due for his labour in so very kindly and ably revising the MS. of this book.

JOHN W. MITCHELL.

DARLINGTON.

January, 1934.

CHAPTER I

EAST TO CALCUTTA

AS the P. & O. mail steamer nosed its way along the quay at Bombay and I stood on its deck, about to enter a new world, I felt vaguely expectant.

Offered an appointment with the Bengal-Nagpur Railway Company as an Assistant Traffic Superintendent, I had jumped like a fish to a fly, promptly 'hooked' it and here I was.

Around in the broad bay lay craft from the seven seas, whilst white-sailed boats skimmed across the placid water like so many birds.

Ahead, the majestic sweep of timbered Malabar and Coloba, with its palaces, once the homes of English merchant-princes and now the domiciles of rich Parsees, set like brilliants in a sea of green, held the gaze.

The whole prospect, with its clock towers and high-storied buildings, seemed so absurdly modern and Western. For my impression of India, formed, I admit, at a distance of 6,000 miles, was one of tigers and of cobras, of wealth, colour and splendour, spilled with a prodigal lavishness that astounded the Westerner by its utter abandon.

During my first few months in the country I was continually compelled to revise my ridiculous ideas preconceived in England, as I came face to face with recurring evidence of Western efficiency. Yet just as continually was I ousted from my new view-point by some Oriental spectacle that, unchanging, had first seen

THE WHEELS OF IND

the light of day when Moses was playing hide-and-seek in the rushes on the Nile.

I certainly saw splendour, but I also saw poverty so abject that its victims gazed upon life with lack-lustre eyes and accepted joy or sorrow, good or evil, with an impassiveness that oft-times annoyed and irritated one.

Colour too was there ; the glamour and the pageant of the storied East, but also drab sordidness.

Almost all the cobras I saw figured in patent medicine adverts. in the English and vernacular Press, whilst the majority of the tigers were viewed in safety, being behind the bars in the Calcutta Zoo.

I hastened ashore, eager to see the unknown, to catch my first glimpse of the India of reality.

Hordes of 'bearers,' or personal servants, wanting new masters, descended upon me. My air of bewilderment bespoke the greenhorn, whilst my fresh English face betrayed the new-comer to these pests.

All were fortified with chits or pieces of paper, testifying to their character and capabilities, from former sahibs. Interested and intrigued by the novelty I scanned one or two of these credentials. Some were too gushing and flowery to be true and obviously palpable frauds, whilst others were so candid in their frank condemnation, that the smiling, illiterate owner was either a complete idiot or so deep-dyed in his own villainy that he actually seemed proud of the fact.

My Scottish companion, an officer of one of the Indian regiments returning from leave, scattered the harpies, with a few snorts in what I took to be Hindustani, although I recognized one or two forceful expletives from the stock-in-trade of any sergeant-major.

"Don't touch these lads with a barge pole," he said. "Get your servants on your own district, wherever

EAST TO CALCUTTA

that may be. These Bombay *wallahs* will probably not settle and will demand repatriation home again."

We eventually got into Hornby Road and here, the clanging electric tram-cars, the hooting taxis, the modern shops and cinemas shrieked their exotic origin.

Was I to be disillusioned, after all? We cut down a narrow Indian bazaar, the workers and vendors sitting cross-legged in their cell-like booths. A whiff came down the narrow street and then I knew it. The Orient at last! I wasn't going to be let down!

A cynic has remarked, "See Naples and die—smell it and want to." I sometimes wonder if this misanthrope had ever wandered down a particularly choice specimen of a squalid Indian street.



The Victoria Terminus of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway in Bombay is a noteworthy structure, renowned throughout the East and West for its architectural beauty and imposing design as well as for the facility with which it handles a large main line and suburban traffic. The 'Gateway of India' pours its streaming thousands through the Victoria Terminus and the Bombay Central Station, the terminus of the Bombay-Baroda and Central India line. In recent years the suburban lines and many miles of main-line track have been electrified in order to expedite this movement.

The Down Overland Mail to Calcutta via Nagpur left the Victoria Terminus at 15.30 (3.30 p.m.) and my friend and I were aboard.

The broad roominess of the carriages was at once apparent, showing that full advantage had been taken of the broad gauge of 5 ft. 6 in.

A comfortable leather-upholstered seat ran lengthways at each side of the compartment. These seats

THE WHEELS OF IND

were used as beds during the night ; two other hinged beds, suspended by chains, like huge overgrown parcel-racks catered for the overflow. The unlucky two slept near the roof whilst their more fortunate brethren reclined below to enjoy the cooling breeze, if any, which came through the open windows or alternatively to receive clouds of fine dust blown in from the sun-baked plains outside. Those down below were less confined and had more room, but the upper fellows were nearer the electric fans and free from interruptions, so perhaps the odds were equal. At any rate, both were as comfortable as human ingenuity could devise and climatic conditions would allow. There was accommodation for four sleepers in each compartment, although I observed there were also small coupé compartments with sleeping-space for two only.

Leading off at the end of each compartment was a lavatory and shower-bath, whilst in each window-frame, under the control of the passenger, were a green glass pane to soften the glare of the noonday sun, one of white glass to admit the calm light of evening and keep out insect pests and a third of wire gauze to allow the inflow of cooling breezes and restrain the wandering flies.

My remarks, of course, apply to first-class accommodation. The second, intermediate and third-class carriages are not so luxurious.

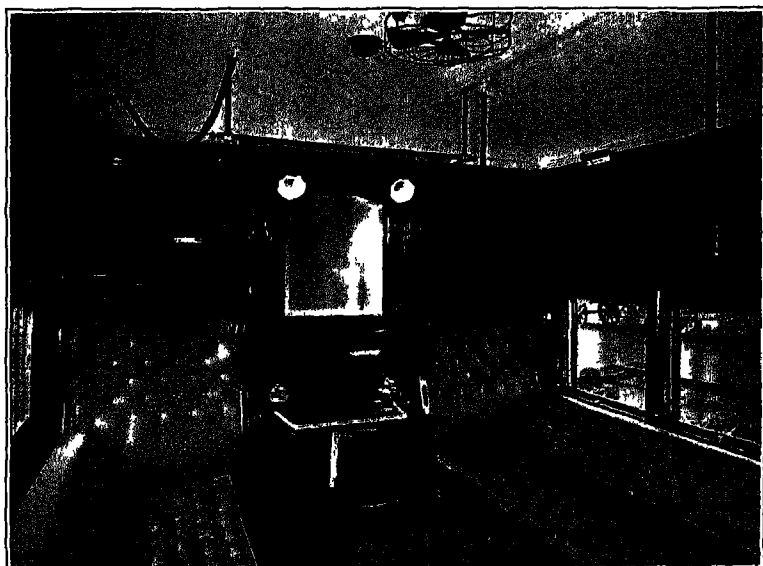
We arrived at Igatpuri at 18.32 and here alighted for dinner, served in the restaurant car attached to the rear of the train.

In ordinary circumstances, when travelling any distance in India, one is invariably accompanied by personal servants. On such an occasion as this, one of them is called into the compartment to keep a watchful eye over one's belongings. The train will make several stops ere the meal is over and we return from



By courtesy, The Editor 'The Railway Gazette.'

INTERIOR OF DINING CAR—BENGAL-NAGPUR RAILWAY.



By courtesy, The Editor 'The Railway Gazette.'

INTERIOR OF FIRST-CLASS COMPARTMENT—EAST INDIAN RAILWAY.

EAST TO CALCUTTA

the dining-car. At these intermediate stations there is every possibility of thieves climbing in from the off-side to rifle unwatched luggage and decamp at the first slowing down of the train after their work is finished. On the Eastern Bengal Railway, by the way, owing to this propensity of wandering night-pilferers, they have, or had, an automatic device which lights up the whole length of the carriages from the outside, when the speed of the train falls below a certain level, thus shedding sufficient light to enable vigilant train crews to detect *dacoits* attempting to enter or leave the train in motion.

In this particular instance, of course, we had no servants. We called for the Conductor Guard who locked both doors against our return.

Dinner was excellent and we did ample justice to it. For a delightfully cooked and tastefully served meal I was asked to pay three rupees or four shillings and sixpence, but my companion pointed out he was under the impression that as a Railway Officer I was entitled to half-charges. Upon the Manager of the Dining-Car seeing my service pass, my bill was forthwith amended accordingly.

Once again I reaped the benefit of travelling with a Scot.

There are a few railway administrations in India who run their own catering departments. It is an open secret that these are, more often than not, managed at a loss, but perhaps the advertising value and convenience are deemed worth it.

In the dining-car a large variety of drinks and smokes was obtainable, also unlimited supplies of ice, replenished at various stations possessing refrigerating plant.

All mail and important passenger trains carry a small compartment and an attendant, who dispenses mineral

THE WHEELS OF IND

waters and ice at a price, of course. It is perhaps unnecessary to mention that no one but a congenital idiot drinks unknown water in India.

We returned to our compartment and settled down for the night. The railroad administrations in India, for various reasons, do not provide bedding. Railroad travel is not a case of a spare collar and a tooth-brush. One travels around with piles of lumber and an attendant or two.

The train tore along through the night, the roaring of wheels and the monotonous rattle of rail-joints deadened our ears, the swaying lights flickered and dazed with their drunken lurch and the steady hum and purr of the electric fans irritated till ignored. The flash of naphtha flares, illuminating the single-line token apparatus at wayside stations, went past in a bewildering dazzle, and as the train pulled up at an engine-changing station, I fell asleep.



It is morning.

As we awake we see the smiling face of a dark-skinned attendant from the refreshment car, his spotless white coat sharp cut against the dark of the carriage door. His *pugri* or head-dress, emblazoned with shining capitals G.I.P., gleams in the dawn light. He carries a cloth-covered tray, and asks if we wish early tea.

We acquiesce.

"What place is this, boy?"

"Badnera, Sahibs."

We find the time is 6 a.m.

For this liquid basis for another day the charge is six annas or sixpence. To me in my privileged capacity it reduces to threepence.

We sip our tea, looking through the carriage windows to watch the Indian passengers dashing hither and thither in

EAST TO CALCUTTA

that aimless way which seems to obsess them, at all times, on a railway-station platform when the train is in.

Pandemonium reigns.

A bedlam of sound fills the morning air.

There, an excited Hindu calls to his household, who run trembling after him with their pots, pans and other chattels hanging around them, like so many itinerant gypsy vendors, whilst, like a flock of frightened sheep, they run from door to door, in a bewildered effort to find accommodation amidst the fully asleep or half-dozing passengers who crowd the third-class portion.

Here, another, with similar cries, drags his retinue and belongings from the train. Some crowd the water-tap, busy with their matutinal ablutions, for the Hindu faith is insistent upon many purifications, however perfunctory. Even on the offside of the train, by the track, around rain-filled pools, those crowded out from the taps wash *dhotis* and *saris* and put them on again, without troubling about their being dry. How the Indian nations have avoided complete disaster through rampant pneumonia is an intriguing problem which always leaves me wondering. An early urchin slyly steals along the train and with a thin cane slaps the bare feet of the third-class passengers, who recline somnolent, with their feet protruding through the open windows, as is their custom. An irate customer, a late receiver of slaps, comes upon the lad, unawares, and soundly cuffs him. Offended dignity is satisfied and boyish impudence howls to unsympathetic ears.

The raucous cries of the various platform vendors are all around us.

Some hawk trays of sickly-looking sticky rings of sweetmeat, known as *jelabies*, whilst others trade bottles of villainous-coloured concoctions purporting to be thirst-quenchers. From their appearance, even Tan-

THE WHEELS OF IND

talus, I should imagine, would have thought twice before putting one away.

The *beri wallahs* barter stocks of thin native whiffs, looking like small pieces of brown paper, rolled up and tied round the middle with a piece of red thread.

Sellers of *pawns* peddle those mysterious three-cornered leaf packages, containing betel-nut, lime and various spices, which are meant to be chewed complete.

The habitual consumer of these aids to digestion acquires teeth of a blackened scarlet hue. When he grins he looks like a vampire who has just 'had one,' and when he expectorates, as he does much too frequently, he appears to be in an alarming state of advanced consumption.



Nagpur at 9.15.

Here we breakfasted. Here, too, we left the Great Indian Peninsula system to enter the Western gateway of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, which line will carry us forward to our destination, Calcutta, another 703 miles to the East.

Nagpur was especially interesting to me as here commences the railway upon which I was to do my service.

The train stopped for thirty minutes to change engines, so I left the carriage to look around.

The same medley of crowds, dashing hither and thither, the same cries in unknown tongues, which I had seen and heard on a dozen platforms since leaving Bombay, characterized the railway station of this cotton centre. The huge water-tower on its high steel pillars, with the station name in Gargantuan letters of steel, arrested the eye. This was a sight typical of most stations. As I wandered along the platform I saw something new at every step. The engine was being

EAST TO CALCUTTA

backed on to its train and I watched the operation with interest. The locomotive, a 'G.S.' type mail engine, shone resplendent in the Indian sunshine, eager for its run to Bilaspur, 257 miles away. I read the builder's name-plate on the smoke-box, 'R. Stephenson & Sons, Ltd., Darlington, England,' and I felt a new sense of pride in my old home town so far away.

Once more we were away, through Kamptee, with its cantonments and troops, on to Gondia, one of the greatest centres for *Bidi* leaf used as a wrapper for the native-made whiffs which we had first noticed away back at Badnera.

Here, we were entering the gates of the 'Kipling Country' and the haunts of Mowgli. The deep inviting jungles lie close to either side of the single track and in the occasional open patches, now and then, herds of black-buck could be seen careering madly along as the train whistled its way through the wild. I caught occasional glimpses of the huts of jungle dwellers through breaks in the living wall of green which sheltered them, each mud hut of the *ryots* or peasants securely fenced to protect it from the ravages of marauding beasts.

The train hurtling along to Dongargarh was now passing through some of the finest tiger country in all India. Here and there patches of open jungle with clumps of bamboo and scrub, amidst massive black outcrops of rock, meet the eye; whilst in the dim distance the black outline of a high range of hills sentinels the horizon.

Yet the outlook was not definitely tropical. A swift glance at the landscape with its dark heavy trees gave little semblance to those pictures one had engendered at home. It was only a closer scrutiny of details which told the observer he had wandered far. I speak only for the eyes. The other senses suffered from no such illusion. They offered emphatic proof that I was a stranger in a strange land.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Bilaspur was reached at 18.19 and here, had I but known it, I was to return, for this was to be my first headquarters' station.



Once again across the level plain towards the coming night.

On either side of the line, in the growing dusk, the slim dark herdsmen with noisy shout, round up the straggling herds, for night is near and the four-footed death which walks in the darkness will soon be abroad. The line runs on again through the India of sun-baked dusty plains and glamorous paths, of tangled jungles and pug-marked drinking-places. On through the India of wooded peaks and rocky cliffs, the haunt of big game in almost all its species. The electric headlight of the locomotive shines up the track ahead and startled shapes stand arrested as if hypnotized by the glare, until with a start and bound they clear the line, or with vexed grunt plunge into the dark masses which border the rails. Here too, occasionally, cow-catchers are more useful than ornamental.

On the hill slopes, on either side, red flames soar to the dark skies. The jungle tribes are burning out the dry undergrowth to facilitate their next season's sowings and to check the career of promiscuous forest fires.

As we lie at some wayside station to cross an approaching train, bright fire-flies give an aspect of Christmas to the dark foliage around.

Onwards we go, hurtling through the night, the engine whistling as it dashes through oil-lit jungle stations or crashing over long narrow bridges, open on either side. These bridges are now spanning inches of water and yards of sand, but in the monsoon they will battle for supremacy against raging floods of yellow water.

EAST TO CALCUTTA

It is to be remembered that India has three distinct seasons.

The parched months of the hot weather from March to June, when the baked, cracked earth gasps in the stark heat and the streams and rivers dry up one by one until they are reduced to chains of pools stranded in the deep beds of rock and sand.

The India of the monsoons when the jungle, awakened to life by the crashing rains, leaps from brown ruin to green maturity in a week, and the thread-like streams, which render ridiculous the mighty span of girders across their sandy wildernesses, rise in their might and furiously batter the abutments of masonry and the strength of steel, sometimes successfully.

And last, there is the India of the cold weather, when 'the sun loses some of its power but the sky none of its blue.' When the cool of the evening tempers the warmth of the day, and the land, fresh from the revivifying influence of the rains, smiles with alluring charm and 'Spring unlocks the flowers to paint the laughing soil.'

Away through Bamra, with its herds of wild elephant and bison, to enter the *ghaut* or hill section at Goilkera, and to plunge into the long tunnel of 'Saranda of the seven hundred hills,' almost the only tunnel worthy of the name from Nagpur to Calcutta.

Past Chakardharpore in a sea of green, past Tatanagar or Jamshedpur, with its blast-furnaces belching to the skies; and on to Khargpur, the headquarters of the Locomotive and Carriage and Wagon Department of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway.

The time is 7.25 on the second morning since we left Bombay, far back to the West.

From now on the country changes to the typical scenery of Bengal. We have travelled over the hot and dusty plains of the Central Provinces and seen

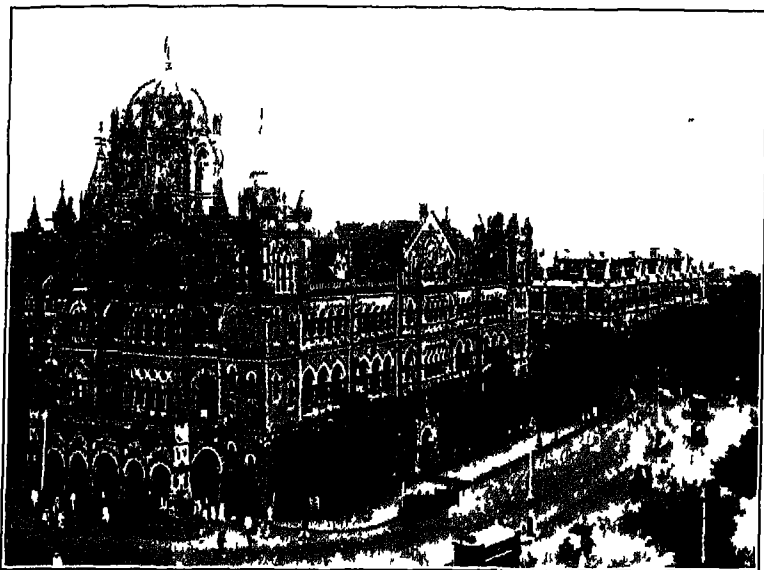
THE WHEELS OF IND

the slim dark herdsmen calling their tinkling hump-necked cattle home. Through the deep dark of jungle with its sinister greenness, again to fertile plains with the peasants working in the *bunded*, water-covered 'paddy-fields.' We have watched the heavy, springless, solid-wheeled country carts meandering along at the break-neck speed of three to four miles an hour, the cart covered with a woven palm-leaf shelter to protect its goods or passengers from the shimmering blaze of the noonday sun. Twice have we seen the moon rise resplendent like a golden lemon over the hills now so far behind. Twice have we watched the rising sun slowly but perceptibly lift the curtain of the dark until, like the developing of a photographic plate, the things of the day were around us.

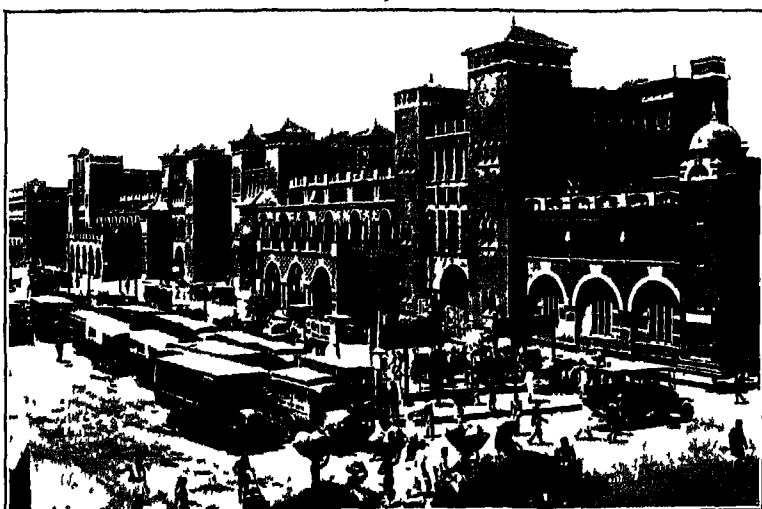
We have left the land of the Gonds, the Bhils and the Kols, Dravidian remnants of pre-Aryan days, with the peoples in their many-coloured clothes.

Through the carriage windows the picture presented to my eager, interested gaze offered more similarity to those highly coloured descriptions of the East found in most school books. At last, I thought, I am going to see the real genuine Orient. The track, which is double line from Khargpur to Calcutta, runs through a land of flat, swampy 'paddy-fields' with lines of mango trees, sugar-cane and tall-growing jute, with glimpses of stretches of water encircling mud-walled hamlets, through vistas of green-fronded palms and bamboo for ever meeting the eye. The whole aspect is definitely more tropical, whilst the many-coloured garments of farther West are superseded by the universal white of the Bengali.

Howrah Station, the joint terminus of the Bengal-Nagpur and East Indian Railways in Calcutta at 10.15 and our journey of 1,223 miles is over.



By courtesy, The Editor 'Modern Transport'
 THE VICTORIA TERMINUS STATION IN BOMBAY OF THE GREAT INDIAN
 PENINSULAR RAILWAY



By courtesy, The Editor 'Modern Transport'
 HOWRAH STATION, THE CALCUTTA TERMINUS OF THE BENGAL-NAGPUR
 AND EAST INDIAN RAILWAYS.

EAST TO CALCUTTA

As the Overland Mail drew slowly to rest, our carriage door was surrounded by a swarm of yelling, gesticulating coolies. These men were not railway employees. The railway administration does not employ porters as do the English lines. The noisy mob swirling round every door were licensed coolies, wearing a distinguishing armlet and identification number-plate.

My friend met a companion, so we parted company.

Three or four coolies seized upon my equipment, one package per man, and apparently assuming my intentions pushed off for the exit. Their short journey to the taxi-rank completed, the burdens were set down and they stood expectantly. I gave them four annas each (the authorized charge, I afterwards discovered, was one and a half annas).

My lavishness proved my greenness. They shrieked, howled and 'Twistlike' asked for more.

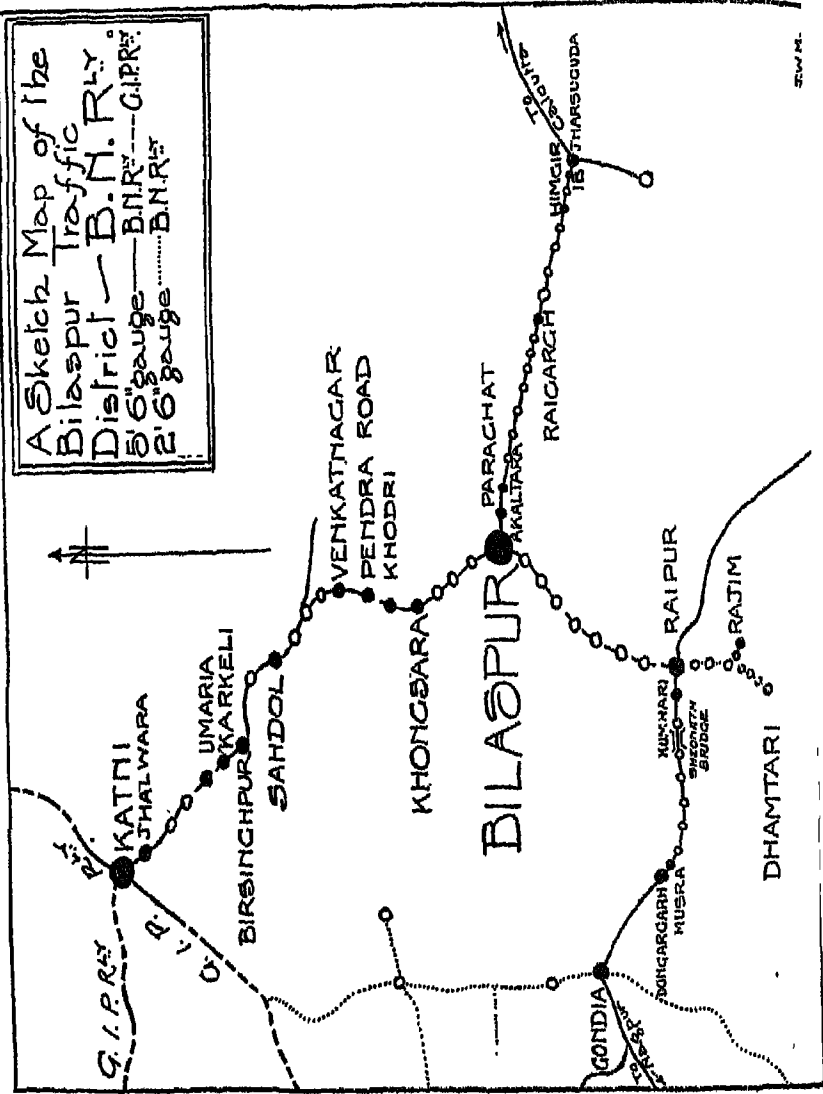
Pandemonium again reigned.

They alternately cringed and seemingly threatened, bawling loudly all the while in a lingo that, personally, left me cold. It was obvious I had put my foot into things, although had I trebled my gratuity the result would have been the same, only more so.

I felt distinctly uncomfortable, the centre of a throng of brawling coolies, the four financially concerned and dozens more of moral supporters and hangers-on.

Eventually I settled the matter by taking back my poor rejected fourpences. They were readily returned me in the avaricious hope that the greenhorn would return same multiplied. I put them, instead, in my pocket and entered the taxi which left the station precincts to the accompaniment of howls from enraged coolies.

A Sketch Map of the
 Bilaspur Traffic
 District — B.N.R.
 5' 6" gauge — B.N.R.
 2' 6" gauge — B.N.R.



CHAPTER II

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

THE Bengal-Nagpur Railway does not, with few exceptions, touch the 'show spots' of India. The tourist is not enthralled by its place-names. It has no stupendous natural wonders like the Himalayas to the far North. With one mighty exception, it has few living temples on its system. Its 3,412 route miles of steel do not enchain towns redolent of the prowess of British arms, and its 4,564 miles of track offers the sensation-seeking hustler but few glimpses of the story-book East.

To those, however, who seek to find the India that really matters, the happy *ryot* or peasant, cheerfully winning with the sweat of his brow the spoils of the rich soil of the Central Provinces or the damp lands of Bengal, or burrowing restlessly like a swarm of ants in the coal-fields of Bihar slowly building up the industrial exploitation of India, the Bengal-Nagpur Railway will show these and more. He who would, may see the manganese mines of Ramtek or Tumsar, the blast furnaces and steel mills of Tatanagar, the *lac* industry of the Ranchi district and everywhere the ceaseless flow of products of soil and hand. The line will carry the seeker after truth to a thousand and one scenes that will show him the basis of the real greatness of India, past, present and to come, to countless spots steeped in lore and story, neglected and forgotten except by a wise few.

The lure of its jungles and its magnificent scenic beauties, however, stand unchallenged, for of these it

THE WHEELS OF IND

offers some of the finest in India. To catalogue names would be but to weary. Suffice it to remark that some few of its forest areas are encompassed in the enthralling 'Jungle Books' of Kipling, and we may tramp again through the deep dark glades with 'Mowgli' and his beasts.



Arriving in Calcutta, I was instructed to proceed to Bilaspur for duty, so I turned round and retraced my steps nearly half-way back across the Peninsula.

I arrived at my destination in the early hours of the morning to be met at the station by another young Assistant Officer, who was to be my stable companion in office and bungalow.

As we drove up the long avenue of trees leading from the railway station to the bungalow, through the bars of silver and black which lay athwart the moonlit road, I felt that I was going to like Bilaspur.

I sojourned there for thirteen months.

The district stretched from Ib in the East to Musra in the West on the main line, with a small-gauge line running from Raipur to Dhamtari and Rajim. In addition there was a broad-gauge branch line, 198 miles long, from Bilaspur to Katni—a joint station with the Great Indian Peninsula Railway. This branch line was a perfect paradise for experienced or amateur Nimrods, and its scenery is perhaps unequalled elsewhere on the system. The major portion of it ran through part of the 13,000 square miles comprising the Native State of Rewa and incidentally some of the finest big-game jungles in all India.

The district totalled 441 miles of 5 ft. 6 in. gauge and 39 miles of 2 ft. 6 in. gauge. This fair-sized mileage, by orders from Headquarters, was supposed to be

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

gone over at least once every month. In the absence of seven-league boots we made out as best we could with mail, passenger and mixed trains, freight engines, brake-vans and trolleys.

Measured by English standards the train service was not large, but the operation of railway transport in India presents problems peculiar to itself owing to the characteristics of the country and its peoples. Long droughts, torrential monsoon rains, sandstorms and cyclones, earth tremors and sundry similar phenomena may at any time be encountered.

It is to be remembered, at the risk of repeating what is, or should be, well known, that India is a land mass practically equal in area to the Continent of Europe excluding Russia, stretching from 37° North to 8° North, thus passing from well within the temperate zone to the tropics, with all the diversity of climate, fauna, flora and peoples which such a range implies. There is no real national unity, such as one finds in the more compact and ordered States of the West. This huge geographical area contains a mixture of creeds and races with seven definite racial types, eight main religions, seven languages totally distinct from a linguistic point of view, and 222 dialects. It cannot be too thoroughly appreciated in endeavouring to assimilate any information relating to this great portion of our Empire 'that there is not and never was an India or even a Country of India, possessing according to European ideas any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious, no Indian nation and no people of India of which we hear so much.'

The 43,000 miles of railway line which spider-web this land of contrasts and so efficiently serve its 352 millions of people is perhaps one of the largest forces making for economic unity, despite the fact that India

THE WHEELS OF IND

only possesses one mile of railway to every 45 square miles of her area as against one mile of track to every 4.4 square miles of the surface of England.



So here I was, to do my best to maintain, or improve if possible, this efficiency of service. I was not immediately concerned with 42,559 miles of the steel ribbon, although at all times I appreciated its relationship to my immediate problem—the 441 miles around me. I was young, eager and new. Straight out from one of the leading English railways, I often rebelled against the spirit of *laissez-faire* which appeared so prevalent.

The Indian staff, I found, were often suspicious of new ideas, being hide-bound by a caste system, rigidly enforced and blindly adhered to, which has 'differentiated the Hindu into over 2,000 species of mankind.' They displayed at times a remarkable degree of efficiency which amazed me and on other occasions an indifference which perplexed and oft-times irritated the Western mind.

In my office, I had two *babus*, or clerks. Both were high-caste Hindus. One would not have touched me with the end of a ten-foot pole, whilst the other not only fraternized with me, but actually condescended to smoke my cigarettes.

Here you get two antagonistic interpretations of an age-old Law.

No doubt there was some politic expedient to justify the introduction of the caste system, in an effort to avoid by religious fiat the risk of a superior race being weakened by inter-marriage with inferior types of conquered peoples. To the Western mind, and to an unbiased Eastern one, the whole system is morally wrong. It needs readjustment to a more enlightened view-

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

point. The whole thing is outrageous. It has outlived whatever usefulness it once possessed in preventing the absorption of an alien stock. To-day it is merely the weapon of an autocratic clique to depress, oppress and class-submerge their less fortunate fellows.

The average Indian, however, is intensely conservative and resents interference. The English ruling power may have thrown a stone into the sullen pool of ages, but the ripples break but slow. Only about 28 millions can read or write, and of these only 2,500,000 can speak English.

In a country whose history, either legendary or recorded, goes back to nearly 3,000 years before the Christian era, it is not surprising to find that movement, particularly of peoples, has been going on for ages. We are all more or less familiar with the hypothesis of anthropologists that the present white population of Europe, as well as those races inhabiting the nearer East, originally came from the fertile Indo-Gangetic plains, where Mother India with her teeming hordes sent successive wave after wave of surplus children, for whom she had no sustenance, Westward and ever Westward, to descend upon the surrounding lands to conquer and to hold. It was the cessation of this age-long line of communication between India and the West, due to the depredations of desert thieves, Barbary Corsairs and Levantine pirates, that first incited those adventurous souls from Spain, Portugal and Venice to grope their way blindly through the Pillars of Hercules and round past the Cape to unveil the new lands of the East. The debt of Western civilization to its almost forgotten Mother is a great one.



Famine in India to-day, whilst not unknown, is usually

THE WHEELS OF IND

a sporadic tightening of the belt and not, as formerly, a wholesale destruction of millions. The surplus of the rich granaries of the Punjab and the North-West Provinces, themselves the fruit of Western brains, is now broadcast to every corner of the Peninsula to foil the bloodsucking money-lending spider who batten^d on the grainless folk around him, and there has been opened up a new vista of hope and activity to countless apathetic peoples ground down by centuries of famine and slavery.

By providing a speedy means of movement of troops and supplies the Railways have aided the Government to maintain the peace. Formerly it took a regiment six months to march from Calcutta to Peshawar. To-day, by train, it takes about two and a half days.

The barriers of huge mountain ranges have been pierced, vast intervening regions of arid desert and almost impenetrable forest have been spanned, the steel ribbon has been flung from bank to bank of mighty rivers, hitherto unbridged, until now the restless tentacles of the iron octopus are feeling their way through the giant barrier between Assam and Burma, and soon these two huge land tracts will be connected by modern ways.

It was into this maelstrom, this spawning ground of millions that circumstance had cast me; this huge heterogeneous mass that seethed and moved restlessly and unceasingly. To me was given an opportunity of assisting in the regulating and guiding of this movement by means of one of the greatest gifts of Western materialism to mystical India—the Railway. I felt privileged to be a cog, if only a small one, in this wonderful organization by which so large a part of India moves and has its being.

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

I gradually settled into ways new and previously undreamt of by me. Bilaspur, I found, consisted of two parts; the railway settlement with a few hundred inhabitants and the civil town proper with its many thousands. When I first arrived the old town was barred to us. Communal feeling was running high. The *kaddar* caps of the followers of Gandhi were everywhere evident, and it was not considered judicious to risk inflaming smouldering passions. There had been one or two ugly incidents—white men pelted with mud by howling mobs, a car window or two shattered by unseen hands of would-be brave men, rude and oft-times obscene expressions hurled at passing white women, and so on. There was a time, not long ago, when the average Indian, advancing towards a white woman on a narrow pathway, would walk into the road and courteously make way for her passage. To-day the same man brazenly struts along and pushes the on-comer into the dust and traffic. I do not wish to enter into the ethics of the case; I merely state the facts.

After a time these frothy upboilings settled down to the scum which usually lies quiescent, mantling the stagnant back-waters in any Indian community, so I took advantage of this lull and paid my delayed visit to the 'bazaars' of the old town.



It is the feast of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Mohammedan year. Throughout the heat and toil of the day, the faithful have abstained from food, drink and drugs. With the rising of the moon, the weary Mussulman throws away the cares of the day and gives himself up to the feasting.

As the *tonga* or native carriage, in which a companion and I sit, clatters over the patterns of silver

THE WHEELS OF IND

and black, which line the mile or so of road to the town, we notice the yellow gleam peeping in friendly fashion through the chinks of the shutters of the houses and hear the clatter of pots and pans and the careless laughter of the followers of the Prophet.

The Hindu wayside shrines with their little terracotta or clay gods, lit up with sacred candelabra made of red earthenware, shine out bravely, visible emblems to the devout. These little lamps are crudely made to some sacred shape, daubed with colours, and filled with *ghee* or clarified butter, the small wicks of lighted cotton floating on the surface.

As we rumble farther into the heart of the bazaars our progress is stopped by an approaching marriage party. The bride and bridegroom in their tinsel decorated *palky* or palanquin, are accompanied by dozens of guests and hangers-on. Each bears aloft a lighted torch, cymbals clash, drums throb loud and the cavalcade passes by, good-humouredly pushing its way through whilst the stream of humanity, temporarily divided, closes again behind and we hurry along on the flood-tide to the bazaar.

Again the stream divides.

This time to avoid a sacred Brahmani bull lying in the middle of the squalid road, chewing the cud. These brutes, nearly as big as English cattle and therefore much larger than the rest of Indian oxen, are monarchs of all they survey. They are super-sacred and do not lower their dignity with the low tasks of labour which are the portion of their less fortunate relations. With their humps painted with yellow ochre, they wander where they like, when they like and how they like. No one interferes with them. Even in Chowringhee, the Bond Street of Calcutta, they lie on the roadway or pavement, meditatively moving with bovine stolidity

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

their cud-chewing jaws, whilst the traffic of a city with a million and a half population goes round these islands of sanctity. The one we have just passed, will, no doubt, shortly rise and, going to some poor vendor's open booth, will eat from the exposed baskets as much rice as would serve the unfortunate fellow and his family for days. It is no doubt at such moments as these that the Hindu faith weakens.

The pungent mysterious odours of the East saturate the night and cling around us. Through the wonders of modern science it is now possible to photograph the kaleidoscope of colour and movement of an Indian bazaar, to record its sights and sounds, but the smells which are more wonderful still—Allah be praised—remain unregistered.

We alight from the flea-bitten, decrepit vehicle which, despite its appearance of advanced senility, has borne us thus far with nothing worse than a few rough shakings. We bid the *tonga wallah* await our return and push off down a side street on foot. The shops on either side are nothing more than cell-like tanks, dark and mysterious, gloomy and suggestive, with here and there one lit up with flares which throw grotesque profiles of the haggling two, the shopkeeper and his prey, on to the whitewashed walls and splash the farther corners with Rembrandt shadows.

We approach one cell.

A large pyramidal shape, which seems in the gloom to fill all the shop, moves to greet us. It is the venerable proprietor himself, a true son of the Prophet, his red-dyed beard showing to all the world the hall-mark of his zeal. Lights are called for, open naphtha flares or hurricane oil-lamps, chairs are placed for the sahibs, and his treasures spread for our inspection. Pierced ivory, polished buffalo horn, smooth brass, embroidered

THE WHEELS OF IND

cloths aflame with iridescent beetle wings and a multitude of other gems of Indian craftsmanship, oft-times a mass of delicate detail built up on a most insipid foundation. Why do the workers in gold and other coloured threads, for example, pile up an intricate design with incredible patience on a piece of cloth which an English housewife would not condescend to use as a duster?

Our fancy seizes on a plate of engraved brass cunningly traced with a rose-flower pattern copied from the walls of the 'peerless tomb,' the Taj Mahal.

Without displaying by outward sign the slightest interest or eagerness to buy, we ask the price. The hoary robber with Oriental optimism states a figure twice as high as he hopes to get. We counter by offering half as much as we hope to pay.

The fight is on.



Shopping in an Indian bazaar is always an adventure. The tempting wares piled all around are as destitute of price tickets as a mouse is of feathers. The whole affair resolves itself into a bewildering effort to grope blindly for the lowest possible buying-price, to wage a losing battle against an opponent who gives not the slightest indication of one's whereabouts in the realm of bartering, eager to clinch the bargain at any figure which obviously is a profit-making one and just as definitely refusing to consider suggestions from the harassed buyer which verge below. At no time, from start to finish, is any pointer given as a fair price. Only by a process of trial and bitter error, derived from experience, does one learn to gauge a figure at which a particular article should be bought or declined.

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

There is no bitterness nor any tincture of mercenary greed about the affair. The shopkeeper smilingly declines impossible offers, laughingly suggests a new compromised figure, or launches out into a high-flown eulogy in praise of the quality or uniqueness of his wares. Smothered in a wave of reeling prices until we forget the figure offered last, battered by a surge of flowery twaddle, lies and truth mingle together in a meaningless tangle so inextricably mixed that if the owner stepped beyond the limits of possibility and definitely told you the correct price and origin of his goods you wouldn't believe a word he said. Bathed in the humid clamminess of the warm night, ears half-deafened by the roar of the stream of humanity pouring along within touching distance, you finally weaken and in sheer desperation hazard a figure.

"*Acha, Sahib, shall I send it?*" comes the quick response, and you go down for the count with a hazy suspicion you've got the worst of the argument. Perhaps, as sometimes happens, to find that your hard-won trophy, though obviously Indian in design and shape, first saw the light in the workrooms of Birmingham and could, if it possessed a tongue, talk as fluently in English as yourself and equally falteringly in Hindustani, does not soften the blow.



In the meantime our worthy host, he of the red whiskers, awaits with smiles and his damascened brass the throwing down of the gage. He will still be there when the sponge goes in, still smiling, but without his plate.

Half the loungers and hangers-on of the bazaar gather in the narrow thoroughfare, each taking as much interest in the fray as if immediately concerned and offer-

THE WHEELS OF IND

ing support and suggestions to either combatant with the utmost impartiality.

Privacy in an Indian bazaar, like Truth, is only found at the bottom of a well. Most things are accomplished in an atmosphere of intimate publicity which is totally foreign to those of the West.

At the end of half an hour matters reach a deadlock. Abdullah states quite definitely that one hundred rupees, which figure, by the way, has shrunk from his first extravagant estimate of one hundred and seventy rupees, is the lowest figure he can possibly give it away for and calls upon Heaven and the great unwashed in the roadway to witness that by so doing he is bringing himself to the very brink of bankruptcy and ruin and that only the very great respect he has for the sahibs warrants such magnificent generosity.

Equally final is our reply, "Eighty rupees, not one pice more, presuming, of course, we wished to buy it." With an air of indifference we rise and leave, ignoring Abdullah, who tumbles his price downwards to what must be, at his own valuation, a most ruinous level.

We walk out into the roadway where a mangy flea-bitten pariah dog howls to the moon and as we reach the end of the street, the soft voice of Abdullah, indicative of resignation to a stronger will, murmurs, "*Acha, Sahib, eighty rupees.*" We take away our purchase, but not any false belief that we've got the better of him. No shopkeeper of the Orient, nor for that matter, of the Occident, sells to lose.

The various vendors in the humming, roaring bazaars, immediately they suspect a prospective customer, indicate a price which if paid would return them several hundred per cent profit. When challenged they eventually sell at a figure extraordinarily low when compared with their first quotation. Their gain in such

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

cases may be almost insignificant, but the margin between profit and loss in this land of incredible values is amazingly slight and a copper or so profit on the deal leaves the seller certainly not a profiteer but most assuredly reasonably satisfied. I recollect once buying up a small dealer's complete stock for one shilling and tenpence. This amazing transaction concluded, the delirious owner promptly put up the shutters for the day and reeled away home to indulge in an orgy of squander.



As the weeks passed I gradually assimilated the new conditions of working Indian railroads and I often marvelled at the high degree of efficiency obtaining. The methods of operation, allowing for the peculiar characteristics of the country and its peoples, were modelled on the best English standards and, by one accustomed to the latter, the broad basis of the former was soon appreciated. Despite the fact that so much of the Indian railway system, the third largest in the world, is State-owned or State-managed, it is indisputable that its present high standard is the direct outcome of the enlightened policy of private organization and enterprise, which has been responsible for the major portion of the construction and development of India's magnificent railroad system. I say system with reserve, because the lines belonging to the various companies and the Government do not form an unbroken network. Whilst there are certain lines connecting at various points with each other, there are many seriously hampered by unbridged rivers and differences of gauge. The River Ganges, for example, with its forever shifting course presents a problem to the engineer almost insurmountable. A glance at a railroad map of India

THE WHEELS OF IND

will show how this great river rolls along for hundreds of miles without a single bridge across its broad waters, whilst on either bank the iron road follows the track of the watery highway. Owing to the peculiar characteristics of this river, train ferries are in use thereon, maintaining connection from one unbridged bank to the other, whilst temporary marshalling yards are pulled up or flung down as the river rises or recedes. One of the ferries on the Bengal North-Western Railway is capable of dealing with 400 wagons per day in each direction.

The main gauges in operation are :

5 ft. 6 in.	(broad gauge, 22,000 miles).
Metre	(18,000 miles).
2 ft. 6 in.	} (3,000 miles).
2 ft.	

Flat-bottomed rails are mainly utilized, most of them rolled in the mills of the Tata Iron Company at Jamshedpur or the Bengal Iron Company at Kulti and their associated organizations. Sheltered now for some years by a very generous preferential tariff, these Indian steel plants have ousted the European firms and another important market has closed its doors on outside makers.

Steel and cast-iron sleepers are largely employed, although wooden and concrete ones are by no means unknown. Telegraph and signal posts are also of steel to protect them from the depredations of climate and white ants.

In some parts of elephant-haunted India the telegraph poles, which sentinel the track for mile after mile, from ocean to ocean, from Himalayan snows to the fronded palms of Southern India, are encircled with collars of spikes to prevent elephant from uprooting them. To go out some morning and find a mile or so of posts pulled up like so many leeks, lying in

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

a tangle of wires, is no laughing matter for hard-worked engineers. The major portion of the 3,400 route miles of track which constitute the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, in common with the other Indian lines, consists of single line and more often than not it is unfenced. Throughout many parts of this system in Central India, dense jungle, the haunt of elephant, buffalo and most of the Indian carnivora, grows up sheer on either side of the narrow road of steel.

On the single lines the trains are crossed at stations which are provided with a loop-line for this purpose. The points, particularly on the branch lines, are usually non-interlocked. They are hand manipulated and manually locked with a padlock and key. The signalling installation is of the simplest and signal cabins are almost unknown, a small open frame on the platform being utilized. The signal arms are lowered or raised by means of a large spoked wheel, which always seems to give a nautical aspect to the place. These remarks, of course, apply to the majority of the country stations. At large termini and important junctions and over large stretches of main line, conditions compare more favourably with those in operation in this country. As a matter of fact, in pneumatic and electrical signalling India is well abreast of modern practice.

The absolute block system is in operation, many types of instrument being utilised. The standard for the Bengal-Nagpur Railway is Neale's Block Token Instrument.

Mails and other non-stopping trains pick up their permission to enter the section ahead from pick-up apparatus which holds the token in a leather pouch in its iron jaws. The apparatus is illuminated by a flare at night.

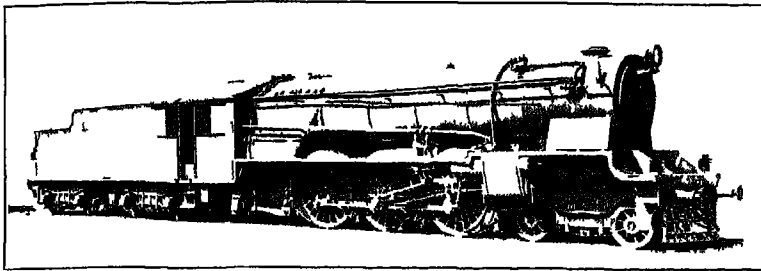
THE WHEELS OF IND

The average length of a block section is, say, 8 to 10 miles, although on the Bilaspur-Katni branch of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway there are only nineteen sections on its 198 miles of single line. The longest, Khongsara to Khodri on the *ghaut* or hill section, is 15 miles long and was occupied 108 minutes by the *up* passenger train and 59 minutes by the *down* train. There is, however, one station to every $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles on the first-class Indian lines, which possess approximately 7,000 stations.

The Bengal-Nagpur Railway, in common with nearly all the other systems, obtained most of its locomotives from England or the Continent of Europe. Judging from many recent contracts awarded to the Continent, patriotic feelings are not being allowed unduly to prejudice the placing of orders for many of the lines, although the recent departure of Great Britain from the Gold Standard has placed firms in this country at an advantage compared with those organizations operating in a country whose currency is still based on gold.

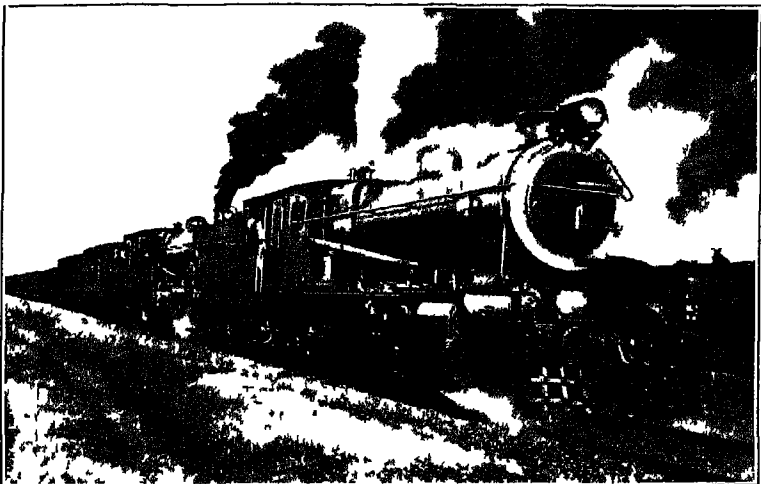
As from April 1st, 1929, all tenders must be submitted in rupees and preference is to be given to material manufactured in the country. This means that many firms interested in the Indian market are either building Works out East or establishing Offices or Agents to safeguard their interests.

The Bengal-Nagpur Railway is justifiably proud of its locomotives. They possess some of the finest and most powerful engines in the Peninsula, the latest being the 4-6-2 Type—Four Cylinder 'De Glehn' Compounds for mail and other fast train work and the 'Beyer-Garrett' articulated freight engines to haul the 2,000-ton coal trains from the Jharia Coal-fields to the Tata Iron Works and to eliminate double head-



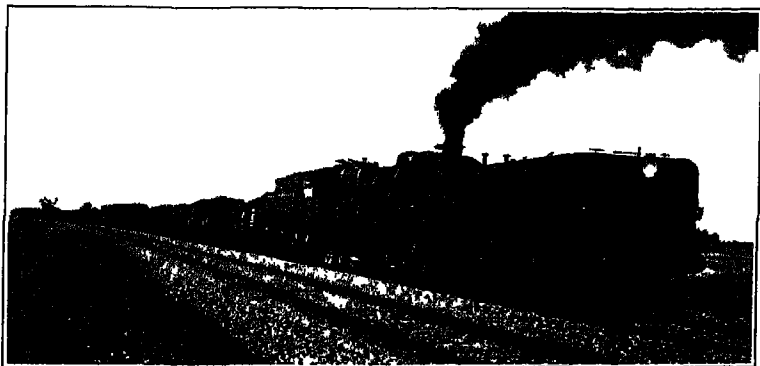
By courtesy The North British Locomotive Co Ltd

M CLASS 'D' GARRATT COMPOUND EXPRESS PASSENGER LOCOMOTIVE
BENGAL NAGPUR RAILWAY



By courtesy, Messrs Beyer Peacock & Co Ltd

1,650 TON COAL TRAIN HAULED AT 8 MILES PER HOUR BY TWO 'CONSOLIDATION' TYPE BENGAL NAGPUR RAILWAY LOCOMOTIVES ON 1% GRADE



By courtesy Messrs Beyer Peacock & Co, Ltd

2,067-TON COAL TRAIN HAULED AT 15 MILES PER HOUR BY ONE 'BEYER-GARRATT' LOCOMOTIVE ON 1% GRADE
2,774 tons have been hauled at 9 miles per hour

NOTES

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

ing or banking on certain other heavy-graded sections of the system. These latter monsters were until quite recently the heaviest locomotives that had been built in Europe.

All the engines have a crew of three, the driver, fireman and the *khalasi*, the last named being a survival of the days of wood-burning locomotives. In 1921 the Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway made strenuous efforts to work his locomotives with a (sufficient) crew of two only and removed the *khalasi* from the foot-plate. Owing to the ca' canny policy adopted by the running staff, this experiment proved abortive. The delay occasioned during that hectic month well-nigh distracted the unfortunate traffic officers as they watched their freight trains crawl about the district like superannuated caterpillars.

Owing to the sabotage instincts of discontented Indians and following various disasters due to the track being tampered with, (as from April 1st, 1928) all train engines on main and important branch lines have been fitted with electric headlights to illuminate the line at night. In addition to assisting the driver for the purpose indicated, this apparatus is also extremely useful for detecting wash-aways of the permanent way during the rainy season, trees blown across the rails and similar obstructions.



In this land of great distances, with its larger towns so far apart, it will be appreciated that ample opportunity is afforded for the running of fast long-distance express trains. India is well served by many fine and well-equipped 'crack' expresses which tear off the miles from the roll of distance with a punctuality and expedition that excites the admiration of all previously

THE WHEELS OF IND

unacquainted with the efficiency of her transport services.

The 'Gateway of the East,' Bombay, and that teeming hive of Job Charnock's built on Hoogly mud, Calcutta, have the 1,300 miles which separates them now compressed into a mere $38\frac{1}{2}$ hours' journey, comfortably and expeditiously performed by the co-operation and efficiency of the Great Indian Peninsula and the Bengal-Nagpur Railways, whilst the traveller between the same two cities is offered an alternative, if less expeditious, route via the Great Indian Peninsula and East Indian Railways.

The latest additions to these examples of the conquest of distance are the 'Grand Trunk Express' which runs from Peshawar to Mangalore, a distance of 2,496 miles (via Lahore, Delhi, Nagpur and Madras) which is covered in about 96 hours; the stately 'Deccan Queen,' which brings Bombay and Poona within $2\frac{3}{4}$ hours' distance of each other—a journey which in 1804 took an English lord with an army of porters six weeks to accomplish; and the famous Empire express, the 'Frontier Mail,' which covers the 900 miles between Bombay and Delhi in $23\frac{1}{2}$ hours and after a brief respite rolls onwards again to Peshawar, another 550 miles to the North. Among the amenities provided on this train are the free supply of daily newspapers to the passengers, the issue of a daily news-bulletin by arrangement with Reuters Limited and the sale of books, magazines and playing-cards to while away the tedium of the journey. When the 'Frontier Mail' arrives at Delhi, the glad news is announced to the waiting folk in Bombay by the administrative offices of the Bombay-Baroda and Central India Railway in that city bursting into a blaze of floodlights.

North, South, East and West, from the sterile *nullahs*



By courtesy, The Indian Railways Bureau, 57, Haymarket, London

WHERE THE 'IRON WAY' CUTS THROUGH 'NO MAN'S LAND' ON TO THE
'EDGE O' THE BEYOND'

The Khyber Pass Railway marches with the famous road, to tread whose surface on forbidden
days is to 'flirt with Death, and court Eternity'



By courtesy, The Indian Railways Bureau, 57, Haymarket, London.

GOPURAMS OR GATEWAYS AT THE TEMPLE OF MINAKSHI, THE FISH-EYED
WIFE OF SIVA, AT MADURA

The sun-blanchd temples and waving palms dominate the narrow-gauge lines of the South
Indian Railway.

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

and frowning, inhospitable deserts of the Khyber country and the Frontier, so ably served by the quasi-military North-Western Railway, to the sun-blanchèd temples and waving palms that dominate the narrow-gauge lines of the South Indian Railway, the rolling wheels, backwards and forwards, ceaselessly revolve.

Truly the debt of the peoples of India for this, but one aspect of the organizing genius of an alien race, is ill repaid by intimidation and boycotting, to say nothing of dastardly deeds of murder and violence. During my sojourn in the country I met numerous officers from the various Indian services, who looked upon their profession as a mission in which they were privileged to give of their best to further the cause of the inarticulate mass of India's millions. One in particular I remember, an irrigation expert whom I met in Bilaspur: one who had, by his many schemes, silenced for all time in many areas the cries for food from living skeletons and the pitiable howl for water from thirst-cracked lips and swollen tongues, when that giver of life, the monsoon, passed over the sun-cracked fields with unwinking eye, and refused to weep with the sufferers in their lamentations.

This Englishman held such high regard for his office and the thirsty millions he wished to help, his mind was so filled with compassion for their sufferings, that after hearing him dilate upon his ambitions and plans to relieve them, I felt awed at finding such nobleness of purpose wedded to so prosaic a science as irrigation engineering. For years has England poured into India her noblest sons and daughters to give unwearying service to the peoples she had sworn to uplift and protect. These willing hands, brilliant brains and generous souls have striven against an array of prejudice and conservatism fanatically hurled against them. From

THE WHEELS OF IND

the very quarters where encouragement and assistance might most have been expected, they met with stolid indifference or deliberate interference.

Their only rewards are the personal satisfaction of labour well and truly done and the humble thanks of an illiterate mass too sunk in enforced ignorance and debased outlook to demonstrate more forcibly their gratitude. If one were not aware that the present unrest in India and the demand for a larger share in its government is not truly representative of the vast majority of her sons and daughters, but merely, more often than not, the nebulous vapourings of self-opinionated, over- or under-educated quasi-*babus*, one's faith in human gratitude would be severely shaken.



As might be expected, engine runs are much longer than is usual in England, even when allowance is made for the wonderful performances of the 'Flying Scotsman' and the 'Royal Scot.'

For example, in 1922, a European driver used to take the Down Overland Mail ex-Bombay to Calcutta, from Bilaspur to Charkardapore, a distance of 252 miles in 8 hours 12 minutes, without change of engine or crew.

No. 68 *up* passenger train leaves Bilaspur at 19.45 (7.45 p.m.) and arrives at Katni, its destination, at 7.18 a.m., and the same crew and engine again leave Katni at 15.0 (3 p.m.) to arrive home at 1 a.m. Similar and longer journeys than these are performed under atmospheric conditions which excite our sympathy for those who are called upon to work in them.

I recollect an English driver who habitually, at the end of his run, used to go under the water column whilst his fireman turned on the water in an effort to

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

rid his sweat-soaked body of the grime and heat of the day. Sometimes, myself, at jungle stations, far removed from anything relating to a bath tub, I have surreptitiously in the half-light of the gloaming, indulged in this somewhat unconventional shower-bath, whilst a companion, awaiting his turn, kept his eyes open for the unexpected approach of Indian maidens. Even in these jungle outposts one must pay a certain amount of respect to the decencies of life.

Whilst the running-time between stops compares favourably with those of other lands, a good deal of time is spent at stations, although strenuous attempts have now been made to reduce such necessary delays to a minimum in an effort to get the throughout timing as low as possible.

The Conductor Guards on the Bengal-Nagpur mail trains were usually Englishmen ; on the freight and coal trains the guards were Anglo-Indians or Indians.

The Conductor Guards on the mail trains were travelling *Pooh-Bahs*. They faithfully carried out the instructions and intentions of the administration, thinking first, last and always of the comfort and convenience of the passengers, due regard being paid, of course, to the exigencies of the moment and the service in general.

I remember one night being on the mail train bound for Calcutta.

At Jharsuguda Station, on the eastern fringe of my district, the Conductor Guard came to my compartment to inform me that he was ready to start, but a local Rajah, travelling on the train with a small retinue bound for Calcutta Races, had alighted and was now seated round a fire, fraternizing with a few coolies who had built a blaze by the side of the track. He refused to entrain again until he was ready to leave the warmth, and turned a deaf ear to the complaint of the Guard

THE WHEELS OF IND

that he was holding up the mail. In his dilemma the worthy official asked for my instructions.

"Give my compliments to the Rajah and ask him kindly to resume his seat as it is most important that this train should run to time. If he declines, start the train at once."

I was prepared to make every allowance for the cool of the night, but I also knew there would be sufficient heat about if the mail stood at Jharsuguda Station much longer. To the polite request of the Guard the chilly gentleman returned an equally polite refusal to comply. Apparently he had not yet got thawed out. So the mail train whistled away and left him to his fire.



Third-class coaching stock is plainly constructed, hard wooden benches sufficing for the hordes who crowd them. Many third-class passengers prefer to travel with their feet protruding through the open windows, doubtless to catch the cooling breeze on these extremities. There is no lack of hot-heads too, however, in the country, particularly in Bengal and Madras.

In Bilaspur, the arrival of the night mail train was, for many of the inhabitants, the event of the day. Dressed in their best, they paraded the station platform to see and be seen. Down near the overhead bridge where the shadow depths lay deepest, small boys and on occasion larger boys who should certainly have known better secreted themselves and, as the train rolled onwards and away, they speeded the parting third-class passengers on their journey by tapping each pair of bare soles with a thin cane, as the exposed feet went slowly past. Very often, of course, such behaviour brought retribution from informed parents who used a cane with effect upon another portion of their anatomies.

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

In Burma, passengers, particularly women, travel with their backs to the window and their arms hanging downwards outside the carriage. The woman of the East, particularly if of the 'nautch girl' type, consolidates all her savings into something tangible and wearable. It is not uncommon to see some favoured woman almost literally covered with ornaments of precious metals and jewels. Such a travelling treasure house simply shrieks for attention from wandering bands of robbers or *dacoits*. Sooner or later she gets it and their methods of stripping the jewelled armlets and rings are extremely drastic, to say the least. The Burmese *dacoit* jumps on to the footboard of some slow-moving train, toiling up a gradient, and with a sharp slash of his razor-edged knife severs the hanging jewelled arms which fall jingling to the ground.

In cases of overcrowding and similar emergencies, third-class passengers are put into goods wagons for transit. The bottom halves of the doors are closed to prevent the travellers from falling out, but due precautions are taken against a complete enclosure and so perhaps suffocating them.

In the recent risings in Malabar, a great outcry was deservedly made in connection with the loading of a crowd of Moplah rebel prisoners into a goods wagon without sufficient forethought being exercised as to how they were going to breathe during the rail journey through the heat of an Indian day. It is not surprising to learn that many unfortunates started the trip alive but finished the course dead or dying.

On many branch lines, mixed trains, consisting of both coaching stock and goods wagons, are run. The shunting of wagons and the loading and unloading of

THE WHEELS OF IND

consignments is performed *en route*, the patient folk in the carriages stolidly waiting, gossiping and fraternizing with each other, apparently thoroughly enjoying themselves, whilst the railway staff wander about with bags of rice or bundles of hides. The station work completed, off they go again, stopping and starting all along the line, until by the time the final destination is reached everyone on the train seems to know everyone else. The local country folk, who have a flair for attaching apt names to the things around them, have christened these trains the *lungri*. The *lungri*, or Indian fox, like most of its tribe, runs for a short distance, then stops, starts again, stops, and so on. It is difficult to imagine a better designation for the mode of progress of these mixed trains.



After I had been in India for a while an obvious question rose in my mind. How has the high-caste Hindu, for example, been persuaded to touch, in the course of a rail journey, the foul bodies of those socially beneath him?

I put this point to a friend who had spent almost a lifetime in the country. His reply was illuminating, revealing a story typically Oriental in design.

In 1853, when the first Indian Railway was opened, a mere stretch of line, 21 miles long, from Bombay to Kalyan, it was quickly realized that India with its caste system was going to prove a difficult field for the popularizing of common passenger travel by rail. There was sufficient in the bare idea to repel the devout high-caste Hindu. He would be called upon to consort with the common herd and might suffer defilement by their contact. A similar position existed in the case of the hundreds of other castes. Obviously, it was both

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

ludicrous and impossible to provide a carriage for each sect. A Hindu excursion with 2,300 carriages would certainly be a transport phenomenon. The whole project was faced by an impasse which appeared almost insurmountable.

In this dilemma, the religious leaders were appealed to and their fiat went forth to the faithful.

"Steam is one of the reincarnations of Vishnu. In the mighty Vishnu, caste is not." Steam, therefore, having been decided to be Vishnu and that God being above all mundane thoughts of caste, the natives patronized the delights and mysteries of this new wonder.

And so to-day they travel, crowded and huddled higgledy-piggledy in their wooden carriages, their bundles of bedding, brass pots and pans and food-stuffs pushed away on the racks or under the seats or more get-at-able between their feet, quite at home, laughing and talking till the train stops at their station and they alight. Now they are no longer with the all-embracing, common-levelling, Vishnu.

Caste is resumed, one's fellow-companions in travel are lowered or elevated to their correct strata in Hindu Society and the world of India goes on again in its ages-long accustomed way.

I should imagine the centuries-old kindly Vishnu is sufficiently adaptable to view steam and electricity as being but two servants of one master, transport, and there should be no need for him to have to undergo the travail of another metamorphosis in order to placate any conservative objection to the new power which India, in the longest stretch of electrified main line in the Empire—as well as elsewhere within her borders—is harnessing to her chariots of speed and distance.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Travel in India is probably the cheapest in the world. We must bear in mind the fact that we are catering for peoples whose purchasing-power is extraordinarily low. The figure of £2 per head per annum as the average income for India is often quoted as being some guide, but this estimate, in view of the progress made during the present century in the industrialization of labour and improvements in agriculture, is rather on the low side. Perhaps an estimate nearer the mark for general application would be say £5 as the net *per capita* annual income for both urban and rural areas.

The average fare for third-class travel is roughly three pies per mile or approximately one farthing. This figure compares with an average English third-class rate of ten pies per mile. Goods traffic is carried at an average rate of six pies or one halfpenny per ton per mile, whilst for coal less than three pies is demanded.

Despite the fact that third-class travel in India is on such a low basis and that in 1931-2 487,037,000 did appreciate this benefit, thousands avoid, and further thousands endeavour to avoid, the payment of fares.

This trouble was always with us.

There was great loss of revenue and time and much annoyance caused by the indifference of thousands to the simple fact that the railroad administration felt they were justified in expecting payment for the service of transportation rendered. The most common method, of course, was simply to enter the train brazenly in the usual way ; but many adopted the more surreptitious (but less public route) from the offside and travelled until detected. It is extremely difficult to devise means of stopping these practices. Open platforms, long stops at stations, illiterate passengers and

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

superstition-ridden subordinate staff all tend to increase the complexity of the problem. In 1932, however, new methods were adopted, from which great results are expected.

In one year, with thirty Inspectors, the Bengal-Nagpur Railway detected 68,329 cases of passengers endeavouring to travel free. In 1928, on first-class Indian railways alone (that is, railways whose yearly gross earnings are Rs. 50 lakhs or over), 2½ million passengers were found travelling without tickets. How many thousands of fare-evaders slipped through the net it is impossible to estimate. During the year 1928-9 the Bengal-Nagpur Railway administration on 259 occasions stopped its trains at places and times not shown in the time-tables, with the result that 13,880 cases of persons travelling blissfully along unsuspecting detection were pounced upon and found to be completely ticketless.

The business of checking tickets is an involved and difficult one. On the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, for example, a Travelling Ticket Inspector may travel in one day, in the course of his duties, through sections of the country where Bengali, Oriya, Hindi and Telegu are spoken. In addition to being a first-class detective, the Inspector has to be a first-class linguist. Pilgrims, especially, travel in large parties to the innumerable hallowed shrines and temples dotted over all parts of India. These holy wanderers, oft-times literally foreigners in a foreign land, move along, ignorant and utterly bewildered by the strangeness of everything around them. One individual, the pivot of this scattered band, somewhere on the train, holds all the tickets. In the almost entire absence of corridor-connected trains, ticket-checking under such circumstances is no joke.

THE WHEELS OF IND

The greatest difficulty, however, is experienced in the handling of so-called religious mendicants. These men, ostensibly, have renounced the world, but in the vast majority of cases 'world' is synonymous with 'work.' I do not wish to imply that there are not *sadhus* who have a genuine urge for higher things and a most praiseworthy desire to be of greater service to humanity, but by far the greater number of this beggar band are *fakirs* and *sadhus* by name and fakes and sinners by nature ; a huge conglomeration of unwashed, ignorant workshy-willies, trafficking and batten- ing upon their credulous and superstitious fellows. Their impudence is appalling. It must be seen to be believed. They openly travel on the railways in the belief that they are conferring an honour upon the administration by allowing it to carry them free, and they defiantly resent interference.

In one year the Bengal-Nagpur Railway ejected over 6,000 of these itinerant beggars from their trains as being without tickets or the means to pay excess fare. Under Section 113 of the Indian Railways Act there is set out no alternative of imprisonment. As these rogues are without means they must, perforce, be liberated to recommence another series of stolen journeys. In any case imprisonment would only afford them protection, food and rest, luxuries by no means to be despised. Any salutary effect of imprisonment upon their case-hardened outlook was, of course, out of the question ; besides, more often than not, the prison accommodation was needed for more deserving cases. I have seen the District Engineer at Bilaspur, who was, amongst other things, Magistrate for the settlement, dismiss batch after batch of moneyless ride-stealers, after blasting them with sulphurous sarcasm and explosive irony. His well-meant efforts in nearly every

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

case fell upon deaf ears and left his incorrigible listeners entirely unmoved.



One night I was travelling on the passenger train from Bilaspur to Katni. We arrived at Pendra Road at 0.17 (17 minutes past midnight) and were due away again at 0.20. It got to 0.25 and still there was no sign of moving. I got out and walked along the platform and at once saw something unusual was afoot, judging from the crowd, including the Assistant Station Master, grouped around a carriage door. I approached and saw the centre of attraction was a '*sadhu*' who had planted himself in the doorway, stubbornly clenching with both hands the sides, whilst behind, a zealous Travelling Ticket Inspector was manfully trying to eject him. The '*sadhu*,' a tall, powerful fellow, refused to be pushed and stood his ground. His filthy, matted, uncut hair, eked out with tow rope, was piled high on his head in a rope-like coil, whilst his naked body was covered with the dirt of years and the ashes from a fire of yesterday. In one hand he grasped his brass *lotah*, or water-pot, and his begging-bowl. In the other he clutched his *lathi*, or brass-bound bamboo travelling-staff, a fearsome weapon in the hands of a desperate character.

"What's wrong, *Babu*?" I asked the Assistant Station Master.

"This man, no ticket, sir, no money, will not leave train or let other people enter."

The '*sadhu*' seemed set for the night. On account of his awkward position the Inspector was making little headway. In between his loud cursings and obscenities which filled the night air, the rascal attempted with his heavy brass pot to get one home now and then on the devoted Inspector's head. Matters seemed at

THE WHEELS OF IND

a deadlock. I climbed up on to the carriage step and seizing the disturber of the night, the would-be breaker of official heads and the definite breaker of railway by-laws, by his loin-cloth, which was, incidentally, the only shred of clothing he wore, I managed with the aid of the 'banking engine' behind, in the form of the Inspector, to pull the indigent wanderer on to the platform. By the same action off came the unwashed one's loin-cloth, so that he stood naked to the heavens.

This was of small moment, however. For one thing, it was moonlight; and for another, it was almost impossible to upset the moral susceptibilities of the delighted passengers who crowded the adjacent carriage windows and appeared to regard the finale as an especial performance intended to enliven the tedium and weary monotony of a long night journey. I turned over the shrieking, gesticulating sham to the care of the Assistant Station Master with instructions to wire for a police constable from Bilaspur, and on his arrival to hand over the peripatetic 'priest' charging him with assault and obstruction.

The next night I passed through Pendra Road on my way home and stopped to ask the Assistant Station Master if he had done as instructed.

"Nay, Sahib, as soon as train gone he cursed me and my wife, my children and family, my cow and my crops, so I gave him food and pice and let him go on next train." He concluded his forlorn tale, of which I have merely given the salient features, with a typical shrug of the shoulders and the invariable Kismet note of interrogation, "What can do?"



Similar incidents occur daily all over the various railroad systems. An impudent set of rogues, openly

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

defying everyone, brazenly twisting the fears, hopes and superstitions of their co-religionists to their own material ends. Time is of no object; Nibbana lies thousands of years ahead and this existence but one of many to be endured in the meantime. Ejected from one train, they merely lie about for a day or so, waiting for another, or do a local scrounge round whilst in the vicinity, pouring poisonous scandal originating in their own diseased minds into the ears of the illiterate, ignorant villagers who may comprise their temporary parishioners. These men by the villainous lies they concoct, many of them so absurdly false as to make them laughing-stocks elsewhere, are no doubt responsible for a good deal of the sporadic unrest sometimes manifest amongst peoples otherwise contented and happy. At one great Rath Jatra Festival at Puri, where we discovered on an average forty-five destitute passengers per train, one such pseudo *sadhu* confessed he had travelled from the South of Ceylon, about 1,500 miles away, entirely free and untroubled with mundane thoughts of railway tickets and similar superfluities. He admitted the journey had occupied nearly a whole year, but why worry?—he had got to Puri at last.



It is difficult to summarize in a paragraph or two the position of the staff of the railways, Indian and European, subordinate and officers. In 1932 there was a staff of 730,000, including 4,500 Europeans and 13,500 Anglo-Indians. Ten years previously there were 6,800 Europeans, a decrease of 2,300 in the decade. In 1931-2, Europeans were given 22 per cent of the appointments to the superior grades on State-managed lines, whilst 78 per cent were filled by Indians. On

THE WHEELS OF IND

the Company-managed lines during the same period the ratio in respect to all appointments was 50-50. The Indian element in the superior services has risen from 28.02 per cent on State-managed and 17.74 per cent on Company-managed railways in 1925 to 36.94 per cent on State-managed and 31.96 per cent on Company-managed railways in 1932; achieved by a corresponding reduction in the European element.

This is an indication of the trend of affairs in modern India in all her public services. It is a very debatable point as to whether this change of policy will be for the ultimate good of India herself. Personally, I feel that this reversal of recruitment, this headlong rush to a complete Indianization of the services will not prove an altogether unmixed blessing. True, it may serve as a temporary palliative to soothe the inflammatory demands of a certain few of India's articulates, but public services demand service, and I am quite certain that India will not easily supply the men to fill the places of those she has grown to trust from generation to generation. England has not always sent her best, a little chaff occasionally gets into the best of wheat, but with a few exceptions her representatives have done their best according to their lights, without fear or favour.

In China one finds the worship of ancestors praiseworthy but ethereal. In India one finds in the worship of family a motive more tangible and demanding concrete offering.

It is amazing to the average Western mind to see this rampant nepotism.

Small wonder the ordinary Indian subordinate vastly prefers a superior of an alien race to one of his own colour and creed. Whilst I have the happiest of recollections of some excellent Indian Officers, worthy

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

fellows, anxious to uphold the highest traditions of the service, I must confess this type was not predominant. Others, possessing a most comprehensive acquaintance with all regulations and printed matter, almost, as was often alleged, to every comma and full stop, lacked the necessary capacity for action to carry out what, parrot-like, they had absorbed, and in cases of sudden emergency simply kicked their heels and waited for the first practical railwayman who came along to take any action required. They ran around looking for small pettifoggish misdemeanours and breaches of necessary but unimportant regulations, eagerly searching for the mote of small rule-breakers whilst often ignoring the beam of really serious delinquents. It is axiomatic that it is at times almost impossible to work a railway strictly to rules and regulations which, whilst designed with the best possible intentions, are not as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. I am afraid that very often the subordinate staff resented this trifling show of authority in cases where a more experienced or broad-minded officer, whilst not altogether condoning such breaches of working, would have passed the matter over with a brief observation, instead of endeavouring to create a mountain from a mole-heap.

The Station Masters at large or important Junction Stations are usually European or Anglo-Indian with salaries in normal circumstances rising to 500 rupees *per mensem* (£450 p.a.). The vast majority of the stations, however, are controlled and manned by an all-Indian staff. The Station Masters at these country stations are sometimes in receipt of a salary lower than that of an English office-boy fresh from school. The wages of the lower subordinate grades descend proportionately, and when one thinks for a moment upon the responsibility which rests upon these men, it is

THE WHEELS OF IND

marvellous that such a high degree of efficiency is maintained in the railway services.

All regulations and instructions, with few exceptions, are issued in English and all correspondence is carried on in the same language. The working regulations, of course, are designed to be as simple and as fool-proof as possible but, even so, it is remarkable what ingenuity is displayed in evading such rules and working things on entirely novel and sometimes alarming methods. One sometimes comes across an Assistant Station Master of a mechanical inquiring turn of mind, who demonstrates to the sahib, in a fit of confidence or bravado, how it is possible to extract a token from the block instrument without troubling his neighbouring Station Master, a dangerous state of affairs which mechanical ingenuity and reasoned regulations have sought to make impossible. Of course, this instrument-juggling Houdini reassures me that he would never dream of going off the straight and narrow path of safe working but indicates his possibilities in that direction. At such times, nevertheless, one feels decidedly uneasy. One almost gathered the impression that upon receipt of any new instruction, much brain-racking was expended by time-killing *babus* in order to circumvent all the meandering jargon of water-tight regulations, and perform the desired operations in some original but decidedly irregular way.

Some of these outposts of transport lie in fever-haunted jungles, and I remember one station where a succession of Station Masters and Assistant Station Masters was the general rule owing to their continued debilitation by malaria.

The station staffs generally showed lack of a sense of responsibility. Threats were of almost no avail. Dismissal was accepted as being by no means a dis-

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

grace, and usually the only effective way to keep them up to the mark was by means of fines for offences committed. It may sound rather ridiculous to say that one went round, occasionally fining that man a penny, another twopence and so on ; but if the sentences were Lilliputian it must be remembered that the wages of these men were by no means Gargantuan.

The effect of these cash reprimands was surprising. Money talks and invariably the Indian stops to listen.

I have referred to the fact that, with few unimportant exceptions, all correspondence is conducted in English, a language foreign to the peoples of India, and it is remarkable what a high degree of proficiency they show in its use. Many ingenious anecdotes appear from time to time in the English Press of *babu* pseudo-English, although one sometimes doubts their authenticity. Of course, there may be grounds for the classic one of the Bengali *babu* who wrote asking for leave of absence owing to the death of his mother and laconically expressed the sad event by stating that 'the hand that rocked the cradle had kicked the bucket,' or of the Station Master with six sons and four daughters who applied for an increase in salary, pointing out that his family now numbered six adults and four adultresses.

Archdeacon Davidson, speaking as a guest of the Institute of Journalists, told how an Indian *babu* contrasted the earlier and later stages of man's life in the epigrammatic sentence, "In life's morning we sow our seeds, in life's evening we cut our corns."

The English, both written and spoken, is at times weird and wonderful and when the earnest *babu* stands before one and expresses himself in comic but well-meant English it is extremely difficult to avoid the ill-mannered error of hurting the speaker's feelings by laughing outright.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Perhaps if I were compelled to express my ideas in the vernacular my efforts would be less praiseworthy. The trouble with the *babu* often arises from the fact that he comes, in his English reading, across high-sounding words and phrases which take his fancy. These he introduces into his written and spoken English at the first available opportunity irrespective of correct meaning or context. In such cases the mixture is rather ludicrous. For example, here is an exact copy of an application for reinstatement, submitted by a short-hand clerk who had been dismissed the service :

“ SIR,—

“ This intrusion of mine upon your precious time may be considered as a humble petition concerning matters of eaking of livelihood which is an important feature of mankind. It is evident from the annals of mankind that every individual is subject to a fault either great or small as dictated by conscience at that juncture. So runs the proverb ‘ Lifeless Faultless.’ I admit that I was at fault and deficient, but for that simple reason cannot totally be condemned. Now I feel extremely sorry to be away from service in the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, wherein almost all my people are employed. I crave your mercy at your generous hand for my reinstation in any capacity whatsoever you deem best which in no way mars my prospects. I stretch forth my eager hand for your generosity and special favour which I am sure will never be rejected and bestow upon me this request of mine which will never be forgotten for ages to come and heightens the reputation of thine generous doings for ever and anon.”

And here is an extract from a report of a quarrel between Station Clerk Sarma and Ticket Collector Rao at Bhojudih on the Jharia Coal Fields. This unfortunate lapse on the part of these two fellow-workers appeared to be the flaring outburst of a long-standing feud :

“ On hearing this, Sarma came rushing to the compartment and insulted me in a worst manner in presence of public passengers. Then I said to him that it is no good on his part to

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

abuse me, while I am on duty. Again he behaving in a worst manner. Then I was quite unaware of tolerate my temper and I have thrashed him from me. Then he gave me a blowing hit on my eyebrow with his pencil, afterwards I have slapped him."

This violent display of passion on Bhojudih platform, which no doubt highly amused the passengers in the train, cost these two pugilistic youths three rupees each.

The finale will be noticed: the 'blowing hit on the forehead' with a pencil, a fearsome weapon to be sure, and the resultant slap in exchange, typical of the pugnacity of the Bengali when roused to blows.

The English at times is bright and refreshing. The universal salutation is "Good morning," irrespective of the state of the sun, and one gets accustomed to dropping off at some wayside station at about 11 p.m. and being greeted with a cheerful "Good morning, sir." One Station Master who rejoiced in the perfectly English name of Shaw would insist upon pronouncing his English as spelt. I am afraid I inveigled Shaw into many unnecessary conversations for the sake of his interesting and original diction. I remember well his station platform sentinelled with magnificent sacred *pipal* trees in which dwelt flocks of what Shaw euphoni-ously described as 'pig-e-on.' Curiously enough, however, he always referred to the bear which roamed near the environs of his stations as 'beer.'

Another Station Master who apparently had learnt his English in a rough school, used always to refer to his fellows in language which, to say the least, was neither complimentary nor polite. Every alternate word of his repertoire embodied sanguinary epithets. When I first heard him I thought he was a hard-bitten reprobate with an alarming knowledge of colloquial English, but I was assured he fancied his abilities as a linguist and irrespective of his audience never moder-

THE WHEELS OF IND

ated his outflow. Perhaps he had studied G.B.S. deeply in his youth. I remember once nearly having to gag him to prevent his making a verbatim report on the station platform, totally unconcerned about the presence of two English ladies seated in the train behind us.

I was travelling on the Bombay mail and alighted at Raipur Station. As I approached the station buildings I heard a tremendous din, and at first, rather alarmed, suspected something desperate was on foot. The noise continued unabated and as I entered the office I heard a probationer Assistant Station Master bawling at the top of his voice into the telephone of the block instrument. I should imagine the *babu* at the other end thought that a cyclone had struck Raipur and he was getting a first-hand listen-in.

"What are you making all that row for, *Babu*?"

"Sir, this man at Kumhari is a fool. I ask him for line clear for mail and he not understand."

"No wonder, *Babu*, give me that 'phone."

I then requested the Assistant Station Master at Kumhari, in a normal speaking voice, to give permission for No. 2 Down Mail to enter the section Raipur-Kumhari. The necessary permission was given, token extracted and the whole job completed in a few seconds.

"There you are, *Babu*," I said, replacing the telephone on the hook, "no wonder the *babu* at Kumhari couldn't make head nor tail of your bawling; speak normally and he'll hear you. Why did you shout at the top of your voice?"

The new-comer to telephones stared at me bewildered for a moment or two. Then he burst out: "Sir, he's eight miles away."

Shade of Edison!



BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

On innumerable occasions the outlying staff rush to the telegraph as an expeditious medium for expressing their grievances, either real or imagined, and many weird and strange messages have dotted and dashed their way over the wires. This propensity for rushing off long-winded telegrams, often referring to trivialities, was a constant source of congestion on the circuits, a sheer waste of time, money and equipment and considerably lowered the value of the legitimate use of the telegraph. The inundation of trivial messages and petty complaints reached such a stage that orders were issued that, in future, senders of other than authorized, legitimate or necessary telegrams would be debited with cost of same. This effectively checked the outpourings of impetuous *babus* who confined their activities to the cheaper, if more leisurely medium of correspondence.

The dress of the Indian Station Master in the warm weather consists of a pork-pie cap embellished with the initials of his railway, a light coat of dark blue, and, of course, the universal *dhoti* or skirt-like nether garment which is passed between the legs and fastened in at the waist. In the cooler season a thicker coat is issued. On one occasion, for some reason a Station Master had not received his thick coat by the time he thought it should have been with him, and the anxious *babu* in a frantic moment dashed over the telegraph the following :

“What can do. Wife and children starving.
Winter uniform not yet come. Send at once.
Believe me my dear Mitchell I am not joking.”

It was considered he had every qualification for being asked to subscribe the cost of his S.O.S.

In a country where from time immemorial no favour is asked for or granted without first being paid for, it

THE WHEELS OF IND

is not surprising to find bribery and corruption only too prominent. The outside staff pay a penny or so to the office *babus* for their applications for leave to be placed before the Officer concerned, otherwise there is grave risk of such epistles being lost in the post. Again they pay a similar amount to the *babu* dealing with the case before the leave is granted them, although the Officer concerned has already gratuitously sanctioned it. Here again there is also grave risk of the unpaid-for confirmation going astray in the same mysterious manner. Station Masters have been known to refuse to supply empty wagons to merchants and when supplied to refuse to allow them to be loaded until they were first personally lubricated by 'palm oil.' Booking clerks sometimes refuse to book intending passengers unless they first receive an additional amount over and above the fare for their trouble.

One morning I went into my office at Bhojudih. Upon my desk lay a plain, unsealed envelope. Inside was a 20-rupee note. I called for the head clerk.

"*Babu*, where is this from?"

"A *peon* brought it from —," he replied, mentioning the name of a local merchant. "His master coming see you this afternoon about his demurrage account."

"I will be away this afternoon, send this back by the messenger," and I handed over the envelope securely fastened to keep temptation out of the way of prying fingers. News travels fast in the East. I was never again given the opportunity of getting rich quick. Never again did rupee notes appear mysteriously on my table.

This cancerous growth permeates all strata of Indian services. It is an ingrained characteristic of the people. Difficult to detect, when discovered it is more difficult to suppress. Proof is almost impossible to obtain. In-

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

vestigation meets with blank denial, sarcastic suggestion of the presence of obvious liars is treated as a humorous contribution and direct accusations of being strangers to the truth are either ignored with a vacant silence or met with a puerile flood of sycophantic refutation. If Ananias has been reincarnated, he must have forsaken his native Jerusalem and emigrated to India. If not, however, and if in the future he considers coming to this planet again, India will provide no field for his activities. His amateur fabrications will pale into insignificance when confronted with the accomplished artists of the Orient, and crushed and broken he will sink back into that oblivion which, but for that one detection, would have been rightly his.

The English Officer does his best to crush this pernicious system of bribery which is so repugnant to him, and takes severe action when necessary and possible, but oft-times he must bow to the inevitable and content himself with trying to prevent it from becoming too flagrant. The Bengal-Nagpur Railway administration periodically issues a warning to its staff regarding this abuse and drastic action is taken against all proved offenders. The following is a copy of such a notice recently issued in the *Bengal-Nagpur Railway Gazette* :

ILLEGAL GRATIFICATION

1. The Administration of the B.-N. Railway is making every endeavour to put a stop to corruption in the business dealings between the railway staff and the public.

2. Among abuses that are prevalent are the demand for and the payment of personal pecuniary satisfaction to supply wagons, to book or deliver goods and parcels, to provide or find accommodation in trains, to issue or obtain tickets.

3. Such practices are neither recognized nor condoned by the Administration, and when cases are brought to notice or are discovered summary punishment will invariably be inflicted.

THE WHEELS OF IND

4. It is the earnest desire of the Railway Company to meet the requirements of traders and the travelling public, and to help the efforts in this direction traders and the public have been asked to bring all authentic cases of demand for illegal gratification to notice promptly, and the staff who may be found guilty in such cases will be very severely dealt with.



Perhaps one of the most annoying and persistent traits of the Indian subordinate staff is their determination to sleep whenever and wherever they can.

Assistant Station Masters on night duty take over charge and immediately commence to make preparations for the night's repose. A *charpoy*, or native string-bed, is placed near the block token instrument and all block signals and the extraction of the token are performed by means of the feet without recourse to the additional fatigue and exertion of rising from the couch of ease. The average Indian possesses in his feet almost the dexterity of his Darwinian relations of the tree-tops.

I remember investigating a case in which it was found the Assistant Station Master had pulled off all the boards in both directions at the same time on a single-line section. By so doing he provided guidance for both *Up* and *Down* trains at once through his station without the annoyance of having to get up from his bed at sundry unearthly hours to send his minions about their allotted tasks in accordance with regulations. Unfortunately, in this particular instance he pulled off the *Up* direction boards before his last *Down* train for the day had cleared the station section. The driver noticed the boards off for the wrong direction and quite correctly refused to enter the block section ahead, for which he held the token. He reported the case, and as so serious a matter called for immediate inquiry I was on the

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

job as quickly as possible. To get anything like a correct version of an affair it is imperative one should be on the exact spot when the affair happens.

By the time I got to the station, over 100 miles away, the staff had got their heads together and when I arrived presented a solid front of liars. They first alleged the driver never saw the signal off and had reported the occurrence out of spite. When this easy solution fell on deaf ears, they put forward the statement that the signal was defective and had been so for some days. This was promptly squashed by the retort that no report had been previously sent in, asking for repairs and other necessary amendment of normal working, and if their statement was correct there had been a gross dereliction of duty.

Caught out on one count or the other they then stoutly and with a persistency worthy of a better cause, maintained that the signal was never off and from this obviously false position they refused to budge.

It is almost impossible at an inquiry to get untarnished evidence. The finding is generally arrived at by forming an opinion based on experience and pertinent facts that speak for themselves together with the evidence of those obviously lying least.

In the particular case referred to, I eventually got to the bottom of the affair by bribing with a week's leave the Station Master of an adjacent station, who was thoroughly *au fait* with the sleeping arrangements of the area, to give me the true version of affairs at the neighbouring haunt of Tired Tims. The next day the delinquent Assistant Station Master was told he could now go on sleeping for ever if he wished, but not in the service of the railway.

At night when one retires to rest to the accompaniment of creaking *punkahs* and droning mosquitoes, it

THE WHEELS OF IND

is with the certain knowledge that the majority of the night staff on the district are stoutly and silently sleeping with one. It is difficult to detect the slumbering folk. One occasionally drops on some novice trying his prentice hand, but the bulk are tough wily veterans with an organized alarm bureau.

As soon as an Officer leaves his bungalow in the usual manner to go out on line the information is flashed over the telegraph wires. To parody an old poster :

“ Along the line the signal ran
‘ Look out, here comes the bogey man,’ ”

so that when I rolled off the train at some wayside station in the early hours I was greeted by a smiling Assistant Station Master and a thoroughly awake staff, whose very appearance emphatically declared that they regarded sleep and work as being diametrically opposed.

* * *

At a certain wayside station it became obvious from the heavy detentions suffered by freight trains, that the night staff were systematically sleeping on duty, but for the reasons I have given it was most difficult to obtain definite proof.

One night I retired to bed as usual, giving no suspicion of my intentions to the servants.

At 2 a.m. I awoke and, dressing, went out into the night and walked towards a level crossing over the main line, about half a mile away.

Presently I saw the approaching headlights of the 2.45 West-bound freight as it pulled out of the Bilaspur Yard.

A brilliant moon flooded the landscape and I had little difficulty in attracting the attention of the English

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

driver who slackened speed to enable me to climb into the cab. He looked rather surprised to see me at such an unearthly hour, alone, but I told him I was on secret service and did not wish my whereabouts to become known. Our first scheduled stop, for crossing purposes, was the station under suspicion and as it would be some time before we arrived in its vicinity I established myself on a seat and took things easy. The driver, alert and efficient, handled his charge as all good drivers do, finding time at intervals to chat with me on general topics. His fireman, an Anglo-Indian, after a brief acknowledgment of my presence, pursued his duties as if I was not there, whilst the *khalasi* or third man, pottered about the foot-plate, sweeping up, dampening coal and turning odd wheels and gadgets at the softly spoken commands of the autocrat at the throttle. The *khalasi* had bare feet, in common with the rest of his compatriots, and sometimes after paddling about on the wet foot-plate he would open the fire-box and then swing home the hot door with a push of one bare foot. Instantly, to my astonishment, a small cloud of steam rose from his foot, but as he repeated, at odd intervals, his steam-raising performance, apparently unconcerned, I concluded his feet were used to it. Although I afterwards often saw this done, its interest always remained.

Through the night we tore, past oil-lit jungle outposts, the fireman picking up the token hoop from flare-illuminated mechanical jaws, which held it by the line side. At last we entered the block section immediately preceding our objective. The station staff were officially aware of our approach. They had given line clear, admitted us into the section and should, under normal conditions, have been waiting anxiously to receive the train, eager to serve whilst it sojourned with them and zeal-

THE WHEELS OF IND

ously and expeditiously to speed it westwards on its way. As the engine came in view of the outer signals they showed a winking but unwavering eye of red and continued steadfast at that colour. The driver shut off steam and prepared to stop his train which he brought to a stand almost under the signal post which still exhibited to all and sundry the blushing evidence of man's untrustworthiness.

"Shall I whistle, Mr. Mitchell?" inquired the driver.

"No," I said, "give me half an hour."

I clambered down on to the track and pushed off for the station buildings. Entering, I found what I had expected: the Assistant Station Master and his merry men, one and all, blissfully and wholeheartedly asleep. I collected the Assistant Station Master's uniform coat and hat, the station block book, two hand signal lamps and a flag or two. I would have collected more, but not being built like a pantechicon nor a container, I have my limits. Arriving back at the locomotive, I asked the driver to awake the echoing morn, and incidentally the station folk, and after another 15 minutes' wait the aroused staff did a spot of work, the red turned to green and we rolled in. In the meantime I put the Assistant Station Master's coat and hat, the two hand lamps and flags into the fire-box. The block book was too valuable a record to be so destroyed. To say that the Assistant Station Master was surprised when the train came to a stand at the station platform and I stepped off the engine, is to put it very mildly.

He positively goggled.

"*Babu*," I said, "what do you mean by coming on duty without your uniform? Get it on at once!"

"Yes, Sahib, I go get it now."

I knew that unless he was a salamander he was

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

attempting the impossible. I followed him into the station office where the half-asleep staff hung around too dazed even to lie.

"Whilst I am here, *Babu*, I will examine your block book."

Instant search ; continued search ; frenzied search ; result : no block book.

"*Babu*," I said, "this is serious. An important record cannot be found and you are held responsible. Furthermore, what do you mean by still standing there and talking to me without your uniform? Where is it? Get it at once and then I'll have a look at your lamp stock."

"There you are, *Babu*, two lamps missing which you cannot account for! Also your uniform which you keep saying you have left at home! And your block book not on the premises! A disgraceful state of affairs and you'll hear more of this!"

Before I left the station I presented the bewildered Assistant Station Master, to his utter astonishment, with his block book, and as we steamed out of the station I knew I left behind a thoroughly mystified staff, vaguely conjuring up in their minds theories of *dacoits*, thieves or ghosts or some other uncanny agency.

My chief went down the line a few days afterwards, and, of course, found the unfortunate Assistant Station Master still minus his insignia of office.

To cut a long story short, the station staff were asked to contribute the cost of two new hand signal lamps and flags ; the Assistant Station Master was ordered to replace his missing clothes, whilst a stiff fine was imposed all-round for negligence and sleeping on duty. The effect was salutary until the scare wore off and things returned to normal.

Almost in my first week in Bilaspur, I came off a

THE WHEELS OF IND

late freight train in the early hours and accompanied by another Assistant Officer visited the Goods Warehouse. We found things as we expected, all the *chowkidars*, or watchmen, soundly slumbering. These men are so unafraid of work, they go to sleep beside it. I remember how we went round these recumbent forms stoutly guarding their charges and, awakening each, asked his name. Each drowsy-eyed, bewildered watchman sullenly answered the roll and, the charge-sheet completed, we departed.



Another serious loss of revenue occurs from the wholesale thieving which takes place and which is a fruitful source of complaint and claims. The railway administrations are fully alive to this peril and do everything possible to circumvent the ingenuity of the wandering pilferer or more determined consignment thief. Through covered wagons are locked and sealed and regularly inspected *en route*, but even in spite of all possible precautions theft is very much in evidence. The steel floors of resting loaded wagons are laboriously bored through. If the load consists of steel drums of kerosine oil, for example, these too are pierced and the contents run off into waiting receptacles. Or again, in the case of bagged or loose grain, hollow bamboos are inserted into the hole made in the wagon floor and the grain allowed to trickle down this crude escape-pipe. If the thieves are humorists I suppose they derive a good deal of enjoyment from witnessing the surprised look on the faces of the railway staff when, with a show of authority and the official key, they open the doors after carefully breaking the seals. In these instances it is a case of unlocking the stable door after the horse has gone. On certain parts of the line

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

where, for various reasons, either operating or engineering, speed restrictions are in force and trains are compelled to stop or seriously slacken speed, permanent camps of train thieves are to be found. The sole livelihood of these *dacoits* is lifting anything liftable from passing trains and disposing of their booty in the bazaars, whose voracious maw gulps down almost anything and leaves never a trace of its passage.

Baffled in their attempts to pilfer guarded luggage, the thieves enter unoccupied compartments and wrench off all fittings, so that to-day only the commonest metals are used for these necessary appurtenances.

I was on Dongargarh platform late one night. I sat in an arm-chair, my legs stretched out along the long arms, awaiting the Mail train that was to take me home. Around me on the platform lay the shrouded forms of intending passengers, looking like so many dead folk awaiting the trump of doom. As a matter of fact it was nothing more fateful than the clanging station bell, heralding the approaching train, that would awaken these ghost-like shapes to frenzied activity. Completely covered from head to feet in thin white cotton sheets they lay, bathed in the brilliant moonshine that drenched the platform and cut out in solid black the shadow of the station buildings. Beneath each slumbering head was a pillow composed of all its owner's material possessions, securely wrapped and fastened. Silently and softly, at the farther end of the platform appeared two ghoul-like forms, slinking amidst the recumbent bodies that made the place look like a gigantic mortuary. Nearer and nearer they came, evidently scrutinizing each sleeping beauty for reasons of their own.

Intrigued and interested I watched their manœuvres. Screened as I was, behind the trellised verandah, they

THE WHEELS OF IND

neither saw nor suspected my presence. Near to me they paused, two tousled heads bent together and the two rascals conferred.

One went to the head of a pseudo-corpse, whilst the other produced a long bamboo cane, which up to this moment had escaped my notice. The pole was armed with a needle-like spike at the end, which desperado No. 2 immediately jabbed into the bare sole of the swathed mummy which lay before him.

The effect was electrical. With a howl of pain, the erstwhile inanimate form leapt to life, all thoughts of his precious pillow utterly banished by this startling awakening.

Instantly desperado No. 1 snatched at the prize and with his accomplice legged it down the platform as hard as he could travel.

'The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley,' however.

It was obvious this game was in the nature of a dip in a bran-tub or buying a 'lucky packet.' Had their victim been some pacifistic Hindu *bania*, or blood-sucking non-violent *mawari*, he would doubtless have simply made the night hideous with his howls for the police and merely anticipated the station bell in scaring into activity his fellow-benchers. Certainly the push-and-pull gentry would have been over the hills and far away before anything tangible was forthcoming. Unfortunately, in this particular case, they had tickled the wrong man. It must have been their off-day. They had succeeded with the dexterity of a diviner in picking on, as well as pricking on, possibly the only pugilistic youth on that platform, a Pathan from the hills.

Realizing in an instant what was afoot, with a yell he sprang to his feet and went in pursuit.

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

The fleeing two heard his cry and tarried not in their going, but their very lead only seemed to lend speed to the bloodhound behind. In desperation they threw the stolen pillow away, but unlike Atalanta their pursuer ignored the bait.

'Atta boy' was his slogan. In sheer fright they caved in and Nemesis was upon them.

Clutching each shrinking neck in one of his huge hands, this six-foot fighting son of the hills clashed the heads of the miscreants together in a resounding whack and then dragged the two limp unresisting bodies behind him to justice and the gaol.

There is a story current amongst Indian railwaymen of another case in which the biter was severely bitten. A certain Indian firm dealing in gold had been in the habit of concealing the refined metal inside brick-shaped ingots of tin in an effort to avoid paying the higher rail charges for the bullion. Their ruse was for long successful. The carriage charges were assessed on the declared and *prima facie* tin ingots and no doubt the swindlers felt that their efforts in reversing alchemic art by transmuting gold into a base metal were extremely profitable. All proceeded merrily until the night prowlers seized upon a consignment of this tinned gold and lifted it to regions new. All efforts at recovery proving futile, the railway company admitted and paid a claim for tin ingots lost in transit, which was all the senders dare ask for. The consignors' surreptitious inquiries regarding the missing gold so disturbed the underworld of the bazaars that the whole fraudulent device eventually came to light.

It was always in trepidation that a train of wagons was left stabled at some out-of-the-way station for any length of time. More often than not the wagons would

THE WHEELS OF IND

be stripped of all oil and pads from the axle-boxes to furnish material for some village torchlight spectacle, or to be sold in the bazaars for a few annas.

This ruthless denudation of wagon fittings was often carried out with the knowledge, if not the direct connivance, of the local railway staff.



The difficulties of keeping the line open and maintaining services vary from season to season. In the monsoon, permanent way and bridges are washed away, necessitating either long detours and diversions or cumbersome and inconvenient transshipment. In the hot weather, scarcity of water often compels locomotives to make much longer runs than normally. Much trouble too is experienced on narrow-gauge lines in the season of gales. Due precautions are set out in the regulations for working these sections of the line, as to the procedure when the wind is howling along at a certain speed or higher. More than once have trains, caught *en route* without warning, been blown over bodily from the rails, a most alarming if somewhat unusual experience for the passengers inside.

The fauna of India, too, impinges in no uncertain manner on its lines of communication.

A common sight on the country district platforms is that of numbers of pariah or pi-dogs, who crawl under wagons to snatch a snooze in the shade, a trick which they have doubtless copied from their human compatriots who frequently practise it. This is a risky, if somewhat solacing, venture and dogs and men have been known to snooze prelusively in this way into the sleep that knows no earthly awakening. These dogs, homeless, ownerless, yellow to the core,

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

are an unmitigated nuisance and a real source of danger. Harassed from pillar to post, flea-bitten and mangy, in the hot weather they rush in frenzy with foam-flecked jaws to bite into their helpless victims the hideous hydrophobia. However, they occupy a small niche of their own in the Hindu pantheon, and in many places the reckless person who ventures unofficially to diminish their numbers is asking for serious trouble.

I well recollect the English Station Master at Katni raising a hornet's nest about his ears as a result of his efforts to wipe out a few of these pests who roamed around his station in packs. On the main line from Jharsuguda to Bilaspur and on the branch line from Bilaspur to Jhalwara the pi-dog is not. These lines run through some of the finest big-game jungles of India, the haunt of most of the large carnivora, including the panther. This brute is extremely partial to dog flesh amongst other things and has effectively exterminated these outcasts of the dog tribe from the station platforms in the areas referred to.

We once got a troop train conveying a Burma regiment through the district. At every stop the cooks popped out and lifted every dog they could lay hands on. They evidently subscribed to Chinese ideas on gastronomical titbits. This train went through the district like a canine vacuum cleaner and for months afterwards the sight of a khaki uniform was sufficient to send the doggy survivors scuttling to their various dug-outs.

The monkey, with the cow, snake, peacock and crocodile, occupies a high place in the religious affections of the Hindu. The *bandar-log*, or monkey-folk, must not be interfered with and, apparently fully cognizant of their exalted state, prove a great source of trouble on station platforms. Cheeky and mischievous, they are inveterate thieves and a careful eye has to be kept

THE WHEELS OF IND

on all small things movable in those areas which they infest.

The vast majority of lines being unfenced, the denizens of the wild often wander on to the track and present a certain amount of anxiety to running trains and station staffs. In some areas infested with elephant, trains are not run after sunset, owing to the elephants congregating in the permanent-way cuttings. At such times they resent the intrusion of locomotives, and are quite liable to charge the rightful occupier of the road. On one occasion a light engine which, having loitered about, was hurrying home to its shed dashed round a curve leading into a cutting and ran slap into a herd of elephant frolicking on the track.

A huge bull, evidently taking the unexpected snorting monster for a prospective rival, promptly charged head on. The force of the impact, in addition to battering in the smoke-box door, lifted the front wheels of the engine high into the air. The momentum of the locomotive carried it forward to bring its leading wheels and front portion down on to the unfortunate bull which fell under the mass of steel. The wheels sheared through the mountain of flesh beneath and the luckless bull bellowed in agony, its roars of pain reverberating through the rocky defile. The ill-fated animal had to be literally sawn and hacked into pieces before the juggernaut of steel above could be released and lifted and the line cleared.

In the entrance hall of the Headquarters' Offices of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway at Garden Reach, Calcutta, there is to be seen a huge skull of another lord of the forest who realized too late that against the strength of steel and steam his mighty bulk availed him little.

We were fortunate at Bilaspur in that the nearest herds of elephant were at Bamra, 150 miles away, on

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

the next district. We did, however, experience trouble with man-eating tigers.

At Birsinghpur several Indians were killed in a very short time and at Venkatnagar Station, on the Bilaspur-Katni branch, six pointsmen were killed and partly eaten by tiger. On giving permission to enter section, the Station Master or Assistant Station Master on duty exchanges for a brass token carried by the pointsman the key which unlocks the facing points, which often lie desolate and alone a considerable distance away from the station buildings. Off goes the pointsman, whistling and singing to boost up his own spirits and scare away the demons of the night. On arriving at the points, he unlocks the padlock which fastens them and, having set them for the approaching train, he awaits its arrival and after it is safely inside the station section, refastens the padlock and returning to the station hands over the key and as a receipt receives back his brass token.

Discriminating tigers observing the lengthy vigil of these poor fellows at lonely outposts, acted accordingly. What with lost padlock keys and, what was more serious, mangled pointsmen, the position soon became critical. The staff left alive, judging discretion the better part of valour, refused to work. One could not blame them, of course; I would have done the same, only much quicker. I wouldn't have waited for the last five to disappear. We were compelled to close the station until the scare wore off.

In my diary for March, 1922, I find an entry stating that at Khongsara Station, on the same branch, the coolies at the water-pumping station refused to work at night owing to a man-eating tiger prowling around.

It was at this place, curiously enough, that I first came into contact with 'Stripes,' as the tiger is more

THE WHEELS OF IND

familiarly called. It was a steaming, muggy night in the hot season and in order to snatch a little sleep, almost impossible indoors, I had placed my camp bed on the station platform, under the wide-roofed verandah, sufficiently out of doors to catch what coolth the night air brought. The breadth of the narrow platform and one set of rails separated us from the jungle which rose sheer from the railway edge and stretched for hundreds of miles. Sound sleep was out of the question. The humidity of the atmosphere and the strange eerie noises of the night kept one more or less awake. The platform was drenched in brilliant silvery moonlight which rendered more funereal and sombre the dark masses of the near-by jungle.

Suddenly, across the line in front of me, something coughed deep in its throat.

"What's that?" I exclaimed to my companion, who had spent a lifetime in these forests of the 'Kipling Country.'

"Oh, that! that's a tiger coughing."

Now it may have been some law-abiding beast suffering from a slight huskiness, but somehow the report of those lads down the line anent the prowling man-eater came to my mind first, and most forcibly stuck there. Man-eating tigers are in no way different, externally, from their more trustworthy brethren. They carry no warning boards naïvely lettered 'I eat men,' nor do they announce themselves in any other way as such. I was behind closed doors, despite the heat, in a good deal less time than I have taken to tell of it.

At Venkatnagar, a tiger stalked a village cow in broad daylight. Unfortunately for the tiger, the cow, with the fear born of witnessing the violent and untimely deaths of many of its fellows, scented the four-

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

footed death creeping towards it and made off. To the horror and stark consternation of the Station Master and his gallant men, the cow came dashing along the station platform with 'Stripes' loping along after it, as if it knew the end was sure. The terrified staff barricaded themselves behind locked doors. The tiger, as I have previously remarked, carried no warning device and so far as they knew might be just as partial to fat Hindus as to lean cows. From the safety of their fastness, through the window, they watched the last acts of what proved after all to be more in the nature of a comedy.

Shortly after leaving the platform end, the tiger disappeared into the jungle, whilst the cow, after going a few more yards, stopped, and with that vast intelligence peculiar to the bovine tribe, looked around for Tiger Tim. She saw him all right. Slap out of the jungle alongside came the tiger, its beautiful body hurtling through the air and its great paws outstretched to kill. Something went wrong, however. Either it was an off-day for 'Stripes,' or he had been put out by his previous detection. At any rate, incredible as it may seem, he missed his mark—missed the terrified cow completely, went clean over its back and hit—a telegraph post. I have already mentioned that telegraph posts in India are made of steel and hollow steel at that. Yet that post was snapped in two as if it had been made of rotten wood. From this it will be gathered that a tiger has seldom to hit twice and that whatever is struck makes no further complaint. No doubt the tiger thought it was a hard world and a still harder post. He had suffered a great blow to his pride and a still greater one to his paw. At any rate he retired to his jungle again, leaving behind him a battered post and a bewildered cow.

THE WHEELS OF IND

I saw the same post the day after it had been smashed and gathered all the details of the affair on the spot. Even the lucky cow was exhibited for my edification. The animal, it is true, could give no evidence of a trustworthy nature, but the post lying in a tangle of wires spoke volumes.

On February 17th, 1931, an electric locomotive was running light to Karjat, on the G.I.P.Rly. ; near No. 10 Tunnel it collided with a full-grown panther which had evidently strayed on to the track. Whilst the driver, an Englishman, was unaware at the time of any impact, an inspection of the cow-catcher revealed a liberal spattering of blood and hair. A careful look-out on the return journey revealed the 8-ft. body of a dead panther which appeared to have been struck on the head and instantly killed. This incident is recorded as being the first instance of an electric locomotive in India killing one of the larger carnivora.

This brief reference to electricity and slaughter recalls the story of the installation of electric power in a certain area in India, which was more than usually well supplied with monkeys. The cables were erected some considerable time before any generation of current took place. Puzzled, yet intrigued, the monkey-folk of the tree-tops watched with fascinated interest the placing of these rope-like festoons in position.

They soon tried them out and pronounced them perfect. Daily they swung from tree to cable and from cable back again to tree-top, chattering and gesticulating. Not in solitary grandeur, but in whole families, they came bounding with abandon from their natural home to these springy creepers which had appeared from nowhere.

Week after week they took these cables in their stride, accepting them, with their limited powers of reason-

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

ing, as merely another adjunct to the morning gymnastics.

“Alas, regardless of their doom,
The little victims play.
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day.”

Gray, the eighteenth-century poet, pens the end of these grey monkeys of the twentieth.

One morning, in the cool of dawn, the engineers completed their months of work and switched on the power. In the growing light the cables stretch gaunt and to appearance unchanged, as innocuous as rope, and to monkey-eyes just as joyously useful. Whizz ! Out of the leafy dormitories come the circus troupe, smashing down from branch to branch, to finish, how truthfully, on the giant trapeze below. Death came in the half-light.

Yesterday the strands of copper, slung from pole to pole, were dead. This morning, they are alive, pulsating with the strength of thousands of volts of electricity. They look just as inviting to any care-free monkey, but the atmosphere is suddenly ominous and sinister. Once bitten, twice shy, is knowledge often painfully and empirically gained. The vanguard of the monkey band had by their sacrifice, definitely warned their remaining comrades that these previously extremely accommodating creepers were two-faced frauds, which had now apparently developed a particularly fatal antipathy against the *bandar-log* or monkey-folk. The monkeys packed up and pushed off to scenes and pastures new, unadorned with easy-looking aids to acrobatics.

Death once came to the monkey-folk in the daylight. I was at Jhalwara Station on the Bilaspur-Katni branch when I received information that a certain Station

THE WHEELS OF IND

Master, many miles away, had either deliberately or absentmindedly put the mixed passenger train into a dead-end siding instead of its more normal and less dangerous route via the main line, with consequent damage to both the buffer-stop and the passenger train, particularly the latter. I thought it wise, in view of the rather alarming message I received, to get to the scene of the mix-up as quickly as possible, in order to interview the erring one and to point out, as forcibly as possible, that a dead-end siding was not the most efficient method of stopping a moving train.

"*Babu*," I said to the Jhalwara Station Master, "stop me the first thing on wheels going towards Bilaspur."

"Sahib, there is a light engine coming."

"Stop it," I commanded, and it was stopped.

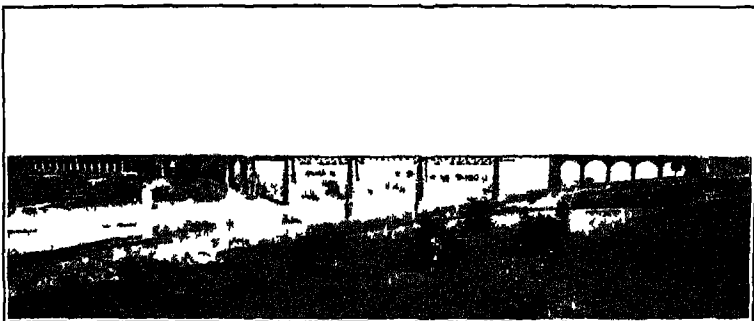
I clambered on to the foot-plate to find the engine was in charge of 'Mac,' a self-styled Scot, whose only genuine claim to Scottish blood lay in his acquaintance with one of Caledonia's emigrants—Johnny Walker.

According to his own yarns, 'Mac' was the modern Nimrod of the East. As a matter of fact some of his thrillers would make Munchausen read like a tract and Mandeville appear colourless.

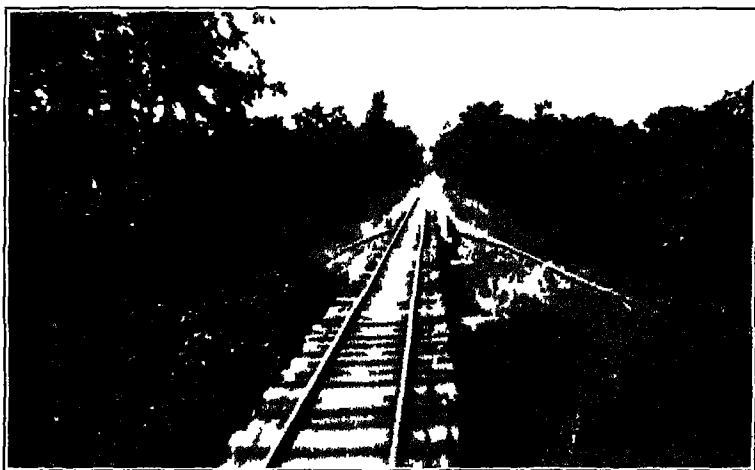
He was, however, known to be a proved distorter of the truth, so was allowed to babble to his heart's content.

"Mac," I said, "I want to be at — before the Station Master there invents more lies than will come natural to him, so open her out."

Up hill and down dale, through jungle outposts, deep dark forest and scattered rocky embankments, only stopping now and then for water. Away again, whistling and shrieking, tearing at break-neck speed onwards and away. We sped down the *ghaut* or hill section at a hair-raising speed, dashing round curves and clatter-



THE BRIDGE OF SILVER ON THE JHARIA CHORD LINE BETWEEN
BHOJUDIH AND MOHUDA



THE MONKEY BRIDGE BETWEEN BHASPUR AND KATNI

BILASPUR AND ITS DISTRICT

ing across long narrow bridges, spanning inches of water and yards of sand in a fashion calculated to unsettle for days to come the balance of the jungle-folk, who watched our progress. The bridges of this portion of the line were narrow single track and open on both sides. Despite warning boards in three languages threatening all sorts of penalties to those who used them as a foot-bridge, and further, despite the 1,863 trespassers killed in 1932 they were looked upon as the only means of getting from one bank to another, as in fact they were.

I was rather alarmed lest we should catch someone unawares on one of these bridges and cautioned 'Mac' to give ample notice of our approach.

Unfortunately, as we neared one long viaduct, 'Mac' was occupied in relating to me as gospel truth a most palpable cock-and-bull story of his encounter in Burma with a king cobra and a wild bison at one and the same time. Either of these man-traps would have been sufficient to occupy anyone's spare time, but that didn't worry him. He rattled along and so did we. Slap round a curve, unsighted by the cutting in which it lay, on to the straight and ahead lay the bridge.

"For God's sake, 'Mac,'" I shouted, "put your brakes on," whilst I sprang for the whistle. The narrow strip of rail and open sleeper was packed from end to end with hundreds of grey monkeys.

We burst upon them like an avalanche, a reaper of death, unheralded and undreamt of. They knew the usual trains, but a non-scheduled light engine caught them unawares, besides no warning blasts from the brazen whistle had come to their alert ears. Panic-stricken, gibbering with fright, those nearest the ends rushed for safety. Others were crowded over the sides and hurled to destruction, whilst many, with a courage

THE WHEELS OF IND

born of despair, dropped between the sleepers and hung on with their hands to the rails or wooden beams. They deserved a better fate.

As the fiery monster thundered across them, it shook many from their precarious holds, whilst the wheels of this veritable juggernaut severed the ten fingers from each pair of monkey hands that grasped the iron rails.

As we hurtled across I glanced down into the rocky depths and saw the scene of carnage. What was the sum total of those seconds of horror I do not know. The jungle keeps its secrets. This I do know. It was many days before the stark vividness of that ghastly scene and the horror-stricken cries of its human-like victims softened from my mind.

CHAPTER III

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

I HAVE previously remarked that the Bilaspur railway settlement was some considerable distance from the civil town. Clustered around the railway station and marshalling yard were dozens of bungalows, housing the railway staff, both official and subordinate. Well laid out, with broad tree-lined avenues and well-made roads, the settlement was self-contained and was one of hundreds of similar townships in India which English enterprise has built up around its many centres of industrial, political and military activity.

There was a two-storied Institute for the European and Anglo-Indian subordinate staff, containing billiard-rooms, dance-floor, tennis-courts, bowling-green and that ubiquitous but most essential element in this land of perennial thirst—a bar. Here the staff gathered together in sportive or in festive mood or merely for throat lubrication. Monthly the railway band, which toured the system for this sole purpose, came along and into the small hours the merry throng tripped the light fantastic of the waltz or the cruder steps of the foxtrot to strains which were all the rage at Home twelve months past.

The Indian staff had their Institute too, at which they had a replica of the larger building adapted to their tastes and feelings.

The Railway Officers, owing to their small numerical strength, shared a club-house with the Civil Officers,

THE WHEELS OF IND

near the outskirts of Bilaspur proper. Here we played tennis or badminton, knocked slightly round balls over a much-used billiard-table, played bridge, talked 'shop' or scandal and assisted in the aggregate to maintain the exports of Scotland.

The club-house, though much moth-eaten, was surrounded by some magnificent trees, and it was most soothing and refreshing after the heat of the day to sit outside in a comfortable chair, near the shadow of these dark masses, twinkling with hundreds of fairy lights from wandering fire-flies, whilst on the soft warm air came the muffled sound of tom-toms from the town behind, or the wail of the gathering jackal packs as they roamed the plains outside.

I well remember the thrill I received when I first heard the calling of these slinking robbers of the dark, rising and falling on the night. They hang around bungalows, ever watchful, cowardly and suspicious, looking for easy pickings. At no time particular, when things are desperate and foraging is hard they will eat whatever their companion in crime, the hyena, will turn up his none-too-fastidious nose at.

I remember one night the doctor asking the old *khansamah*, or butler, at the Club for someone to take his bicycle home. In stentorian tones, which caused all eyes to be directed upon him, the old man bawled out :

“ *Doh Admi!* ” (Two men.)

Expectantly, his audience waited. Out from the dim back quarters rolled his summoned stalwarts—two small boys.

Here were his two men.

Everyone laughed loudly, which seemed to huff the old fellow who quite failed to appreciate the comic side of the answer to his call.

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

Club life in India whilst possessing many advantages, possesses also its drawbacks. It affords a common meeting-ground for those of an alien race, but it breeds petty jealousies, scandal-conceived bickerings and supercilious snobbery.

Home life is almost non-existent. Children, except very small ones, are conspicuous by their absence, and the weary round of club and more club, night after night, offers little real satisfaction to heat-irritated nerves. This, however, is part of the price we must pay for our sojourning in the East.

As we wander homeward to dinner, our footsteps lighted by the fitful rays of a hurricane lamp carried by a servant, we hear in the distance, approaching us, the shrill singing of some belated pedestrian. Nearer and nearer he comes, bringing his brass-bound bamboo staff or *lathi* down on to the road with a clang, at every step.

This he does to warn others of his approach, to instil courage to his flagging spirits but principally to scare away the death that crawls.

In most parts of India it is extremely unwise if not definitely foolhardy to walk abroad at night without a light with which to locate the snakes which, whilst not so common as is often imagined, are sufficiently plentiful to require this very necessary precaution.

Most of the snakes are of nocturnal habit and slither about amongst the undergrowth or asprawl the paths and roads, carelessly leaving themselves lying about where the unwary wanderer may easily tread on them and be bitten.

The *krait* in particular is very sluggish and being deaf cannot hear approaching sounds ; whilst his dark colour, blending with the shadows of the moonlight, makes him very inconspicuous. Gliding around he pur-

THE WHEELS OF IND

sues his silent trail, looking for frogs and small rodents, young birds and eggs. After the monsoon rains, the night air is full of the cacophony of multitudinous bullfrogs. To hear one deep honking bass suddenly rise to a shrill staccato yelp is evidence of the night wanderings of hungry reptiles and also definite testimony that another good frog has been gathered to his fathers.

I remember once going for a bath in Bilaspur and as I reached for the towel I saw, luckily in time, the dark body of a *krait* stretched taut across the towel rack. No doubt it had crept up through the waste-water pipe.

I was through the bathroom door in a flash, picked up a shot-gun and blew off the *krait's* head together with, incidentally, large pieces of plaster from the bathroom wall, in less time than it takes to tell of it.



Whilst no doubt there are many stations much better than Bilaspur there are undoubtedly many infinitely worse.

We had one great cause for complaint and yearly our cries ascended to Calcutta and yearly remained unheeded. We had no electric light and power. Lack of rupees, the bugbear of many promising schemes of development in India, negated the willingness of Headquarters to help us.

So we remained in our pristine state with native *punkahs* and oil lamps, although some of the latter were definitely superior to any illumination the newer power could offer.

The maintenance of an adequate oil supply, however, became a serious problem.

Regularly we purchased large tins of kerosene and regularly the 'boy' rolled up with his "No oil, Sahib, what can do?"

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

This invariably happened a week or so after each new consignment until I began to think that the servants either drank the stuff or indulged in an orgy of illuminations during our absence on the district.

That they stole it never entered my innocent mind. I was not, as yet, versed in the subtleties and perquisite-pinching performances of Indian 'bearers.' After a few weeks of this wholesale inflation of the sales of the Burma Oil Company I mentioned the mysterious absorption of oil at our bungalow to a friend of mine, the wife of the Divisional Locomotive Superintendent. She was a charming, motherly soul, who had spent a lifetime in Central India and was thoroughly *au fait* with the peculiarities of Indian servants.

She laughed as I explained my puzzle.

"Next time your 'boy' asks for oil, tell him he won't get any till the month end. At the same time advise him, if he wishes to avoid being fined, that you insist upon the lights being nightly lit for the same period."

I did as suggested.

The 'boy' duly appeared for oil at the end of the second week after the last new tin had been opened.

"Oil, Sahib?"

We went to the go-down or store room.

Tin empty!

I dived off the deep end about the colossal waste of oil in the bungalow and told the 'boy' I was getting no more till the end of the month. He appeared rather upset at my attitude and went off into mathematical calculations of numbers of lamps, hours burnt, etc. He wound up by propounding the conundrum: how could I expect lights if there was no oil? His apparent sincerity almost convinced me but, remembering the advice I had received, I stuck to my guns.

"It doesn't matter, 'boy', I am opening no more tins

THE WHEELS OF IND

of oil and I hold you responsible for seeing these lamps are kept in order till the end of the month. If not, I'll cut your wages."

We closed the matter at that, he almost in tears and I secretly apprehensive.

It worked. Nightly the visible light engendered by invisible oil gleamed through the bungalow windows, and thereafter each tin of kerosene spun out its correct and allotted span. I afterwards discovered that each night after the lamps were put out, the vessels were emptied and the residue poured away into some receptacle. Next day a further supply was asked for and in all good faith supplied and so the merry game went on. The nightly pilferings soon filled up the secret store, which was then haled away to the bazaar by the 'boy' and sold to some dealer for a few coppers. No doubt the 'boy' meant well for himself by it and from his point of view it was unfortunate I sought an opinion elsewhere. This no doubt explains why many Indian servants prefer service with a bachelor at a less wage than might be obtained with a *mem-sahib* about the place. In the former case there is no interfering, no too-knowing woman always about to poke her nose into the affairs of the kitchen.

What do bachelors know of the intricacies of a sweet or the unplumbed mysteries of a cake?

Each morning the 'boy' rolled up for his rations. Housewife-like I questioned him and like a 'quarter-bloke' ladled out his ingredients.

"How much flour, sugar, tea, etc. etc.?"

Each morning he asked for a tablespoonful or so extra. I couldn't check him, and he knew it. Once again, the hoarded surplus disappeared into the bazaar and the 'boy' retired to rest, happy and contented, if not exactly independent, at least heading that way.

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

Each night he came to see me and recited his spendings for the day. Meat, potatoes, vegetables, fruit, etc. etc.

Did I know the local fat-stock prices, or the paltry rise of *pice* and *pies*? Of course not, as again he very well knew.

Besides, for days on end the bungalow was left untenanted except by one of the 'boys' who stayed behind. Surreptitious tea-parties to all his cronies, at my expense, no doubt whiled away the time. For months, the servants' quarters of our bungalow were used as a gambling-den, with my companion's 'boy' as chief swindler.

It was only the wailings of a plucked pigeon to the police that disclosed and promptly closed the local Monte Carlo.

Baksheesh from wandering jugglers and tricksters, bonus on a percentage-of-sales basis from itinerant *banias* or *box-wallahs* derived, of course, in the first place from the common fount of all rupees, the *sahib*, put their emoluments on to a varying scale.

Yet where can one find such capacity, adaptability and willingness as is found in the average Indian personal servant?

Both our 'boys' were Moslems.

Kasim, my own 'bearer,' was a wonder. At jungly stations away from all supplies, with a couple of bricks and a sheet of tin he produced a dinner fit for anyone.

How he got his supplies at times was a mystery. It was sometimes hinted that he blackmailed the local railway staff for free chickens, on the strength of his relationship to me. Of course the price for same was duly included in his list and paid. He had one main vice, however, booze.

Monthly, after being paid, he would appear, glassy-

THE WHEELS OF IND

eyed and strangely proper. I did not suspect him till one night in laying out my clothes for dinner he put out a dinner jacket, a pair of tennis flannels and leather shooting-boots.

When I asked him what he was doing, he gave me the glassy stare and uttering an inane giggle, turned round and strode away as stiff as a ramrod and about as intelligent. I did not see him again that night. Next morning we had a few words together. I accused him of drinking, pointing out I was under the impression the Koran did not countenance such goings on. He flatly denied the accusation, asserting he was suffering from malaria the previous night and there the matter ended.

Kasim, alas, got tight again the next month. But never again did he repeat his fancy-dress display. He might have mixed his drinks but not my clothes. He always saw to it that sartorially I was O.K.



I had been in Bilaspur about a fortnight. My companion was called away to an outside station and for the first time I had the bungalow to myself for the night. I retired to rest under the mosquito net and was soon in a light sleep. As was customary, the doors and windows were wide open on account of the clammy warmth of the night. About 2 a.m. I awoke with a start, bathed in perspiration. The eerie noises of the night hummed about me. I listened hard. Then again I heard the noise that had roused me. Almost, it seemed, at the bedside, a babe began to wail in a fretful voice. Fearfully and timorously I peered through the curtain meshes into the solid black of the night. The wailing broke off into short sharp sobs which died away to be succeeded by hoarse bursts of demoniac

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

laughter. The sweat of heat and fright and the fear of the unknown sweltered me.

Had the bungalow compound been invaded by some maniacal baby-slaughterer? Again the wails and the hellish laughter. In desperation I yelled "*Kohn hai?*" (Who's that?), but only the silence of the night answered my challenge. I waited and waited, got out of bed, lit the lamp and looked around. Nothing! What was the nature and purpose of my visitor? The cries did not rend the night again and at last, still puzzled and unsatisfied, I crept under the net and lay till dawn.

As soon as the settlement was astir I went across to the Divisional Locomotive Superintendent's bungalow and told them of the howling in the night.

They laughed at my story!

When they told me who my alarming visitor was I laughed too. It was that prowler of the night, that aristocrat of the scavenging department, the cowardly, carrion-eating hyena who, with his powerful jaws that are said to bite through cold steel, soon removes the evidence of death. He never came again to 'put the wind up' me with his midnight serenade. If he had, I would have laughed with him, although I will not easily forget his one and only appearance.



In the best room of the bungalow we had a very fine Mirzapore carpet of which we were extremely proud. One day we returned from off the district to find that in our absence the huge, lumbering, sacred 'Brahminy' bull of the local Hindus had paid us a visit and left unmistakable evidence of its call on the carpet aforesaid. We were both speechless with indignation. George justly so. It was his carpet. I

THE WHEELS OF IND

merely lent, as it were, moral support. His language smote hot and blasphemous on all 'Brahminy' bulls in general and the Bilaspur representative in particular.

He went tooth and nail for the young *chowkra*, or lad, whose duty it was to keep inviolate the bungalow and its surrounds from wandering beasts, and threatened in the heat of his passion to plug the offending bovine with small shot if it came anywhere near the place again. The lad, a Hindu, promptly went and reported the sacrilegious ambition of his vengeance-seeking master to the indigenous Brahmins.

We were sitting on the verandah having tea, when a deputation of Hindus filed before us and begged that we would not harm their bull. George had by this time calmed down, so I assured the anxious group that we had not the slightest desire to hurt the bull or their feelings, but pointed out that whilst we appreciated their point of view that great honour had been paid us by the bull actually coming to see us, we were not anxious for a repeat visit.

My companion still uttered general threats of wrath to come if the quadruped arrived again, but I fancy the men before us felt reassured that things were all right once more. They promised we would not be further disturbed and went their way rejoicing. After that I often noticed a small boy hanging around our compound gate. Whenever the bull appeared to fancy our habitation, he promptly headed it off to bungalows and compounds new.

Another trouble was the invasion of marauding goats. At certain times grass was almost as scarce as snow and in desperation the goatherds used surreptitiously to open compound gates in the early pearly dawn to let their charges have a quick browse on the cultivated shrubs and plants which some patient and optimistic

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

mali, or gardener, was endeavouring to coax through the concrete ground. After a visit from these devastating locusts on four legs, what had, in the evening twilight, blossomed as the rose, in the cold light of early morning appeared like a blasted heath.

In a Hindu country, of course, beef was totally out of the question. Perennially the cook served up what he smugly termed 'leg of mutton.' As I saw never a sheep the whole time I was in the Central Provinces but countless goats, I am afraid the fellow with the beard masqueraded in a woolly waistcoat for the final act. If my surmise is correct, then perhaps the goats felt themselves fully justified in eating the meagre greenery of the flesh-devouring unbelievers.



Past my compound gate ran a small portion of the 60,000 miles of metalled roads, which bear the ceaseless flow of the millions of feet of India's sons and daughters as they restlessly move over the face of the land in a never-ending flood.

What a story the roads of India could tell, if given voice !

Of the countless types of humanity trampling through the dust and heat, fording bridgeless and oft-times crocodile-haunted rivers, doing *puja* or religious ceremony at the sacred trees and shrines by the wayside, eating and camping, living and dying, conducting business, pleasure and intrigue with that delightful air of intimate publicity so essentially Eastern.

The wandering mendicant with his bowl, the religious fanatic measuring his full length on the ground at every step, yard after yard, mile after mile, surely the slowest form of transport known; the *bania* and the *mawari*, the commercial traveller and banker of the East; the

THE WHEELS OF IND

yogi and the ashes-covered *sadhu*, the jugglers and smugglers, tricksters and twisters in endless procession.

What a canvas for another Jusserand to paint an 'Indian Wayfaring Life of To-day!'

Of course, 60,000 miles of road doesn't go round far in a land mass like India. It is eked out by stretches of *kachcha* track of varying degrees of dependability. These highways which run throughout the length and breadth of the Peninsula, connecting each remote hamlet with its fellow and linking together the 600,000 villages of India, are mere beaten tracks trodden down by the feet of those who passed before.

For hundreds if not thousands of miles, however, the only direct way for pedestrians to get about the country in a straightforward manner is by the side of the railway. Despite the caution of warning boards and the too frequent drastic examples of violent death, they still persist in trudging along, in single file, by the edge of the steel track as it cuts its way across the face of the land.

In the Bilaspur district we had a number of fairly decent roads for several miles around, but these soon petered out into cart tracks and earth roads and usually disappeared at the first water. The great lack of bridges severely handicapped lengthy road journeys, as in the majority of cases all vehicular traffic must be ferried across waterways or pulled or pushed through the sandy wastes in the hot season. The *burra-sahibs* of Bilaspur who owned motor-cars thus exercised their vehicles in a sort of huge pen whose limits were set by the streams which cut across the track. In any case careering along a road at night or early dawn was a most hazardous adventure. Unheeding groups of country folk appear blissfully ignorant of any rule of the road, or impudently defiant if aware of such safeguards. Meandering lines

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

of patient, hump-necked oxen, slowly dragging their solid, wooden-wheeled, springless country carts, loaded with produce, move through the night into the tropic dawn of another day, the drivers fast asleep on the shafts. On the right- and on the left-hand side and on the crown of the road, these moving death-traps roll along at the break-neck speed of about three miles an hour. The leading oxen trudge steadily along, the long line stolidly plodding after, like a game of 'follow my leader.'

To meet a convoy such as this in the mists of early dawn means a slamming-on of brakes and a deafening tootle on the horn, to rouse the slumbering drivers who, bewildered, endeavour to steer their charges past, occasionally knocking off a headlight or some projecting fitting in their drowsy efforts to gauge the clearance.

To my mind, these patient, willing, submissive oxen are the deification of Transport.

They are certainly one of the keystones of the Hindu faith: the tillers of the fields, the givers of milk and of *ghee* or clarified butter, beasts of burden, companions in the home and emblems of the faith. Their sanctity is never questioned. In time of famine, the evils of which are now happily almost eliminated, thanks to transport, the Hindu watches his family and friends perish and in the midst of disease and horror his faith remains unshaken. He watches his cow die, too—and even then he doesn't eat it!

With all this reverence and adoration, however, he often grossly maltreats his bovine companions. The beasts whose tails are one long series of broken joints through cruel twisting, to say nothing of other malformations, must be legion. Surely after so many long centuries of venerating the cow, the Indian driver could have devised a better method of taking the tail

THE WHEELS OF IND

off his bullocks than deliberately to attempt to twist it off piecemeal from the living body. Their fly-whisk tails rendered useless through man-made deformations the poor brutes are left helpless victims to all the flying pests and the tropic heat, whilst methods gruesomely reminiscent of the Inquisition are resorted to in an effort to extract the last ounce of cow-power.

I once saw a poor beast down in the dusty road, its patient eyes glazed with pain and senility. Utterly spent, it had staggered the last few steps to collapse, totally exhausted. Did the driver immediately release the old bullock from the yoke? Did he with tender solicitude for an old and willing labourer bring it cooling water or a wisp of fodder? Did he compassionately talk to his old companion with soothing words as he attempted to diagnose its troubles?

He did not.

He kicked it and cursed it and its progenitors to the umpteenth generation. Words and blows availed him nothing. Worn out and weary, the work-spent bullock was insensible to kicks and deaf to curses. The infuriated driver went to the cart, took out some hay or other combustible stuff, set it alight and placed the burning mass under the belly of his aged servitor. The flame and pain infused desperate energy into the stricken beast. It jerked to its feet and passed along down the road in a cloud of dust on what was undoubtedly its last journey to the accompaniment of loud shouts, tail-twisting and thwacks from the boor, intent only upon keeping the animated corpse on the move.

One must make every allowance for the slow-witted, ruminating cud-chewer, who shows up very unfavourably when contrasted with its fellow-worker, the alert and intelligent horse. Even so, considering that the 300 millions of peasants in India owe their very exist-

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

ence to that jack-of-all-trades, the ox, the least he is entitled to expect is tolerable treatment when in health and kindly care in sickness or old age. With few exceptions, he gets neither.

In this land of paradoxes, a most authoritative body has estimated there are 16 million oxen and 8½ million cows, entirely superfluous, in British India alone. These for the most part sacred beasts are said to cost the country about £170 millions annually to maintain. This figure is more than four times the entire land revenue of British India. What a colossal drain these must be upon the country, consuming much yet giving little tangible in return. What a stupendous luxury to be afforded by a country whose inhabitants are individually so poor !



The little stretch of red *moorum* road past my bungalow compound gate always interested me, as I watched at various times and periods the ever-changing kaleidoscope of colour and movement along its dusty, heat-hazed or twilight-softened surface. The movement of India's peoples and goods was my special province and, although at the time I did not realize how much the dusty trails of India were to threaten the revenues of the iron track, I always felt an interest in watching the ebb and flow of the human tide.

I have watched that road almost deserted at noon in the hot season when, they say, "Only white men, fools and pariah dogs are abroad"; when the bazaars in the native town are dead and silent, the dust lying undisturbed, inches deep in the slumbering street; when the heat-haze dances above the ground until the sun-soaked natives crawl into their crude shelters, under leafy shade or even beneath the railway wagons stand-

THE WHEELS OF IND

ing on the line ; when even the Indian crow, impish, cunning, hardy and apparently devoid of feeling, has removed his wearisome presence and insolent clatter clatter on the zinc-tiled roof, his raucous caw-caw temporarily suspended.

The day drags wearily on. About 4 p.m. there is a bustle and stir about the road which betokens renewed activity. The white population are hurrying along to Club and Institute to snatch a set or two of tennis before the daylight fades. The road is once more alive with people, ambling along on foot or in various types of ox- and horse-drawn vehicles, and clouds of dust rise up as incense to the Goddess of the Night, whose heralds even now are showering defiance upon the sun who sets, unabashed, in a glory of flame, game to the last.

Night-time in Central India, however, does not always bring that relief from the overpowering blaze of the day which might be imagined. At night in the hot weather, from March to June, the baked cracked earth seems to give up its heat. The air is still hot. With open windows and doors the weary sleeper lies bathed in perspiration whilst the *punkahs*, or native fans, swing creakily to and fro. Mosquitoes hum, looking for whom they may devour.

In Bilaspur, during most parts of the year, beds can be placed out of doors, thanks to the dryness of the atmosphere. Full advantage of this privileged relief was taken, but it was most necessary for the open-air sleeper to be up and about soon after that pitiless disk of burnished steel, straight brought from the forges of the East, appeared in the heavens on his journey again to the West.

In the cold weather, on the other hand, the nights are delightful with their glorious moonshine. The large

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

leafy trees are pleasantly cool and the air acts like a tonic upon the impoverished physique of the plain-dweller.

The great lamp of the night comes down my road chequering it through the mazy meshes of the branches with patines of pure silver. Across the rising globe, those great bats of the night, the Indian Flying Foxes or Fruit Bats, wing their way from the mango *tope*, or grove, where they have passed the day in slumber, hanging head downwards in their thousands. They make for the wild fig trees in the bungalow compounds, at times showing up clear cut against the low-hung moon, like the eerie horror of Dracula.

They tear the fruit to pieces, despoiling and destroying with their contamination, shrieking and fighting and gnashing their small terrier-like teeth, whilst with ghoulish shuffle, most weird and horrible to behold, they move from branch to branch by means of the hook appendages on their wing-joints.

I once put a charge of small shot through the wings of a male, and the vampire-like shape hurtled down 'plonk' into a small concrete tank full of water. As he came to the surface he attempted to get out over the narrow sides. His grotesque, uncanny contortions reminded me most forcibly of some legless and armless animated trunk, propelling itself along by loathsome and horrible shuffles, the while his teeth were set in a fiendish grin. I felt too 'goosey' and horrified to help him out, so with a despairing wriggle and a snap of his dead-white teeth he sank like a stone. I fished him out and found he was over 4 ft. long from wing-tip to wing-tip. He had a perfectly foul stench and I gladly handed him over to my boy, to be skinned. The skin came back from the tanners just like thin leaf parchment covered with beautifully soft, beaver-like fur. My 'boy' announced with evident glee that

THE WHEELS OF IND

one of the other servants had eaten the body with great relish and intimated that any others would be found most acceptable in the same quarter. Remembering its appearance and smell, this evidence of a curious gastronomical taste gave me a feeling of nausea.



Towards the end of the rainy season the nights in Bilaspur are particularly poisonous. Leather goes green and mouldy, rubber articles perish, rifles and other metal articles have to be carefully watched, matches won't strike and everything smells sodden and damp.

Some years ago every music-hall comedian and street-corner urchin *musically propounded to the people of England a natural history enigma.*

"Where do flies go in the winter-time?"

With little success the puzzled populace endeavoured to elucidate the mystery. Some suggested inside clock-towers, holes in walls and the like. One wag thought they removed to glass-works to get made into blue-bottles, but this was treating with levity a serious proposition.

Let me tell you where they go!

To India after the monsoon.

Every night after the lamps are lit they arrive. Large ones, medium ones, small ones, flying gnats, humming mosquitoes and huge lumbering fellows as big as chest-nuts, with fiery red eyes as big as peas. Not in mere family parties nor in company with a few relations only, but in their billions.

I have seen, in the dawn, the verandah of my bungalow covered an inch deep all over with the shed wings of flying ants. Dinner is consumed at the progress of a gulp and a fly-swat. Everything must be covered as long as possible. When a plate, say, of

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

soup is placed before one, some big beetle, redolent of anything but rosewater, will flop into the stuff and effectively contaminate it.

Eating at such times calls for more fortitude than the fasting of the Moslem at Ramadan.

These insect pests for the short time they are abroad make this period of the year a most miserable one. However, it is an ill wind that does not blow someone some good. The little gecko-like lizard who roams about the ceilings and walls of every bungalow has the time of his little life. Flies and more flies simply come and ask to be eaten. His sharp, snake-like, glutinous tongue moves in and out with lightning rapidity until, with distended tummy and slow crawl, he returns to some corner of the bungalow wall—too full for words.

He, too, knows where flies go in the winter-time.

These little lizards inhabit nearly all bungalows and we had our fair complement. He is a squat, ugly little fellow, of a dirty mud colour, thoroughly harmless, of course, and one soon becomes accustomed to his presence. He runs about the walls and ceiling, upside down, with perfect control, apparently creating a sort of vacuum with his small sucker-like feet. He well repays his shelter by devouring multitudes of the flies and other insect pests with which India is so generously provided.

It was rather interesting to watch him stalk an unsuspecting victim. The lizard would run a few steps, then stop, another run, another pause, until he was a few inches from his next meal. Out came the long tongue with lightning speed, and the fly had gone.

When the lizards in running around came to the corners of the room they jumped from one wall to another. Sometimes they fell from their lofty haunts on to the floor. In most cases, the lizard was unhurt,

THE WHEELS OF IND

but for the loss of his tail. It was curious to find the tail would wriggle for many minutes after its breakage from the parent body. The lizards in such cases ran about for some time, tailless, like a Manx cat, but eventually the tail grew anew, although it was no uncommon sight to see a new tail sprouting from the body at a curious angle, whilst the stump of the former appendage still projected in the normal spot.

It is said that if a lizard accidentally falls from the ceiling on to anyone below he excretes a liquid which burns the bare skin. As any lizards that fell always landed on the spot where I was not, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this statement. These small reptiles, by the way, are voiceless, except at mating-time, when they produce a small shrill squeak which can be heard penetrating the stillness of the night.

I have sometimes spent an idle moment in trying to hit with a tennis-ball these little fellows who shared my bungalow with me. In almost all the rare cases of a direct hit, the lizard, unlike the sheep of Bo-Peep, left his tail behind him.

This propensity for shedding their tails under excitement seems to be common to many lizards. There is a small reptile, with a pale, dry body and a long brittle tail, found near most habitations. He rejoices in the gory name of the 'Blood-sucker.' As a matter of fact he does not suck blood and is, like most lizards, perfectly harmless. He lies on the sun-bathed walls of wells and other flat surfaces and incessantly nods his head in a gesture of affirmation. I have on numerous occasions caught these lizards napping and grasped them by the tail. Immediately the owner darted away as if nothing held him, leaving in my hand his long, slender tail like a dry, thin twig.

The Mohammedans kill him on sight and tell a

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

curious tale in explanation of their ferocity towards the harmless fellow. Long ago, Mohammed was pursued by enemies. He took refuge in a well on whose walls reposed one of these lizards. Protecting forces spun a spider's web after the Prophet had descended and his enemies, looking down and seeing the unbroken threads, decided they must look elsewhere. One of them, however, noticed the lizard, whose head kept nodding up and down, and said, "The lizard knows something." The web was broken, Mohammed captured and centuries of feud engendered between the followers of the Prophet and the harmless reptile who, by his fatuous waggle, had betrayed their master.



From lizards to snakes is not a far cry and Bilaspur possessed a goodly number of the latter. Whilst usually they were treated with that familiarity which almost breeds contempt, they occasionally made their presence known in no uncertain fashion. The railway doctor in Bilaspur had a perfect passion for snakes and collected them with enthusiasm. He was alone in his hobby. No one appeared jealous. It must be explained, however, that his interest in snakes did not proceed from the same source that urges the small boy to stock rabbits. The doctor was imbued with a more laudable ambition : to discover, if possible, a universal antidote for all snake poisons ; or, at any rate, to contribute his quota of knowledge to the common fund.

He was a perfect encyclopædia of knowledge anent the sinuous death-traps of India, and I often listened, deeply interested, as he explained their little ways.

India affords habitation to over 300 kinds of snakes, some deadly, others less venomous, whilst many are

THE WHEELS OF IND

totally innocuous. In the prickly-pear hedges that guard the mud-walled villages, in the thatches of the hovels, the holes of sun-bathed walls, hanging from trees in jungle wildernesses, shuffling through the dust of highways, stealing through open doors and less publicly up the waste pipes of bathrooms, the death that crawls is almost everywhere present.

In 1927, the last recorded year, 19,069 persons suffered an untimely end through snake-bites, although it is to be feared that not all the toll officially put to the credit of him of the poisoned tooth is rightly his.

Thousands of head of cattle, too, are destroyed yearly in a similar manner, so that it is obvious what a blessing it would be if, suddenly, all the poisonous reptiles of India at the sound of the pipe of a modern St. Patrick of Hamelin Town rushed headlong for the sea and plunged to their destruction. In such an event one hopes they are not long-distance swimmers. This desired consummation, however, is not likely of attainment. An unnumbered host of snakes is housed in hundreds of miles of deep impassable dense jungle and in un-get-at-able, out-of-the-way spots and, what is more important, shielded from harm by the pious superstitions of 240 millions of Hindus. Nevertheless during 1927, 57,116 snakes were destroyed.

The British Raj in India, despite its shortcomings, and they are surprisingly few, has for many years sought to encompass the elimination of the majority of the venomous snakes by inculcating into the Hindu *ryot* some sense of his material losses, but the effect, if any, is negligible. The giving of rewards for dead snakes was in effect almost discontinued as it achieved nothing except the temporary enrichment of certain jungle tribes. These lads, almost devoid of super-

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

stition or religion of any kind, made a speciality of farming and breeding snakes, with the result that a decree fashioned to decrease the number of snakes actually increased it.

The snake, particularly the cobra, dominates the sculptured story and written lore of the Hindu mythology. Fan-like his hooded head hangs over Brahma the Creator, his body provides a couch for the mighty Vishnu, the Preserver, and the symbolic snake-drum which hangs slung on the trident of the dreaded Siva will one day be furiously rattled when the divinity of destruction ushers in the end of the world.

The sacred cow is useful and harmless, the sacred *bandar*, or monkey, mischievous but not deadly, the sacred *mugger*, or crocodile, performs a useful service in the sanitation of rivers and pools, and the sacred *moorghi*, or peacock, flaunts his gaudy colours in the jungle sunshine or screams shrilly from the marbled terraces of some Eastern palace, but the snake crawls in darkness and silence, leaving death in his noiseless path.

The cobra proper is found in almost every part of the country districts and owing to the reiterated publicity it receives is accepted outside India as the worst of its crawling evils. I consider, however, the *krait* is more to be feared. He is more common and more sluggish and for these reasons infinitely more deadly. I saw half a dozen *kraits* to every cobra.

Most snakes including the cobras are oviparous, but some, the viper for example, bring forth their young alive ; whilst these reptiles are invariably cold-blooded, at such periods the temperature of the female snake perceptibly rises. Young cobras are blind when hatched and remain so, like kittens, for about seven days. During

THE WHEELS OF IND

this period they are innocuous, the poison apparently not developing at birth. Immediately, however, the eyes are open, the young cobra fills up its magazine and is ready for action. The full-grown cobra carries death in its jaws sufficient to account for many strong men, and, of course, if compelled to utilize its full armoury at once, is rendered impotent until the virus renews. Unfortunately, if one should meet a cobra in such an enfeebled state, it carries no notice such as 'Bar closed' or 'Out of Dope' and should in all cases, therefore, be given a wide berth. The virus itself, when extracted from the poison-bag, varies in colour from an opaque milkish-white to a clear straw colour. It is like aeroplane poison—one drop kills.

It is to be remembered that the majority of snakes, with the possible exception of the hamadryad of Assam and Burma, are not prone to attack if left alone. The cobra will show fight if cornered, rearing up to half its length, whilst with angry hiss it inflates its hood, which normally is not so noticeable. Its head and body sway from side to side, until the movement changes and the cobra swings backwards and forwards, soon to spring upwards in one swift leap and to sink its teeth into its victim.

One night I was going down my piece of road when I met the Yard Master. He was carrying a .303 rifle which apparently he had borrowed from the Bengal-Nagpur Railway Volunteer Armoury.

"Hello," I said, "what's afoot, mad dogs or what?"

"No, sir," he replied. "A cobra is living in the stove of the kitchen at the bungalow I am moving into. The bungalow has been unoccupied for some time and this morning my 'boy' says he saw a cobra disappear up the chimney."

Having at the moment nothing better to do, I fell

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

in and went to see the slaughter. Arriving at the cook-house, the would-be snake-slayer got a long piece of wire and poked in and about the stove. For a long time nothing happened and I suggested that probably the snake the 'boy' had seen was but a figment of imagination, engendered by repeated libations. As if to vindicate the maligned one's sobriety, almost immediately a large cobra slithered out of the stove and made for the corner of the hut. Escape via the door was cut off and, frustrated, the baffled reptile reared himself in the corner and commenced to sway from side to side. My companion hurriedly grasped his .303 and almost lying full length on the floor he pressed the trigger. A cloud of brick and plaster dust obscured the scene for a moment, but, when the cloud dispersed, the cobra was still intact. Again a shot, another cloud of debris and again the snake unharmed and obviously getting rattled; every time the Yard Master took a shot where the snake was, it wasn't there when the bullet arrived. It seemed to me that if much more of the cook-house wall was blown out the poor old cobra stood a very good chance of being crushed to death in the falling ruins. At last, a lucky bullet found its billet. I believe the cobra got sick of dodging alternately the bullets and lumps of plaster. At any rate the swaying head and slaying lead came together and the headless body writhed on the floor in fantastic post-mortem contortions.

The hooded horror of Hinduism, however, was presently avenged.

Barely a few short months had rolled away, when the ceiling of this same cook-house, which to-day looked down in unblemished indifference on the wriggling death agony of the crested destroyer, was bespattered with the blood and brains of the unfortunate Yard

THE WHEELS OF IND

Master, who put a bullet through his head when the future loomed dark and foreboding.



Much has been written of snakes, and I have no doubt much more has yet to come. Their story is by no means ended. Ever since the day the serpent got into Adam's allotment we've had trouble with them. When the sinuous body of death held out the apple to the lady in the story, she might, to use a colloquial expression, have realized there was a bite in it.

Anyone who dwells for any length of time in the country districts of India is almost certain to make the acquaintance of snakes in some way or another.

Horrible and loathsome brutes, cold and clammy to the touch, they give no warning of their proximity, show little fight, but the toll they exact is indeed ghastly. The snake does not deal in half-measures. If he bites, he poisons ; and if he poisons, the victim usually dies unless he is extremely fortunate. There is one good thing, however. This crawling death-trap is easily put out. A smart tap on the back, with a thin cane, dislocates one of the vertebræ and the snake writhes harmlessly on the ground till the head is crushed beneath the heel.

In many parts of snake-haunted India, each bungalow is surrounded by a 6-ft. wide path of ashes. When the warmth-loving snakes attempt to cross this protective belt in order to enter the house, small pieces of ash get under their scales and irritate and disable them. Marooned on the cinder Sargasso they lie, until discovered and destroyed.

The only defect of this protective zone is that, in the wet season, the path gets sodden and solid and

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

in some measure is thus rendered passable to the slithering doer of evil.

It is remarkable, if not amazing, how the impression persists, even in India, that snakes inject poison with their tongues.

It is difficult to account for this fatuous fallacy.

On what grounds could it have arisen?

All snakes, both deadly and harmless, have tongues. But whoever heard of the tongue of anything biting anyone, even if every allowance is made for a certain type of female who is referred to as possessing a 'biting tongue'? A snake bites, the very word gives us the clue, with its teeth, like you and me and everything else capable of biting.

In the cobra, for example, there is a pair of large fang teeth on the upper jaw. Near their base is a reservoir, containing the venom. From this reservoir runs a tube out on to the gum to the base of the tooth where it terminates. This poison-tube or channel is not carried into the tooth for a very simple reason. The teeth are not socketed or fixed into the jaw. They are merely attached to the gum. It sometimes happens that certain of the snake's victims not unnaturally resent being swallowed and put up a desperate fight. In the ensuing struggle the teeth are liable to get broken off. In such an eventuality, does the snake worry? Not he! The wound heals; the contraction of the gum draws another tooth, already formed, into the vacant place; and the itinerant dentist, having replaced his missing molar, is once more ready to open shop and administer his death-dealing drops. These replace teeth he possesses in unlimited supply, in various stages of development. They lie within a special fold-

THE WHEELS OF IND

ing of his mouth and are drawn as required into position.

Down each fang tooth a narrow groove extends, the edges of the opening overlapping to form a duct or channel with an opening at the base and another at the tip of the tooth.

There in brief is the whole diabolical outfit. A poison-bag and syringe, hollow tooth and the poison itself.

Some snakes, the cobras for example, lift their heads and strike forwards and downwards. The vipers, on the other hand, thrust out their open jaws from amidst their coiled mass.

In any case, the result is the same.

The teeth inflict an open puncture or wound, the poison-bag is squeezed, the venom runs down the grooved channel into the wound and the fell deed is over.

To be effective, the poison must enter the blood of the victim. As a matter of fact the venom can be swallowed with immunity. But to those curiously minded, anxious to test the truth of this assertion, I would hasten to add one word of warning. Make a strict examination of your mouth and throat as far as possible, take it for granted that the rest of your interior is free from cut, scratch or rupture and when thus assured, carry on. If by oversight or ignorance, however, the slightest entrance to the blood-stream exists between the mouth and the stomach then the experiment will prove fatal and my word of caution be completely wasted. The poison, consisting of two principal ingredients, after entering the blood-stream acts with astounding rapidity. One agent breaks up the blood in an amazingly short space of time. The other attacks the nerve centres, causing paralysis and unconsciousness.

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

For many years medical science has devoted some of its keenest brains and most patient workers to the problem of antidotes for snake poison.

Antivenines are produced from the blood sera of animals, usually horses, who have been immunized by regulated doses of venom. These anti-toxins must be injected hypodermically and, moreover, in view of the rapidity with which the venom acts, must be injected almost immediately following the bite and in large doses to effectively combat the poison. A further drawback is that there is not known as yet an antivenine common to all snakes. The doctor administering the injection must know the type of snake which caused the bite in order to be able to give the victim the correct antidote.

It is almost useless staggering into a hospital or dispensary and saying, "I'm sorry, but a snake has just got one in on me, give me an injection." The doctor would require to know whether the offending reptile was a *krait*, cobra, Russell's viper, or one of the many other hiking horrors of India. In the absence of such clinching evidence he can only administer general treatment, inject on guess, and notify the Coroner. As snakes usually stir abroad at night it is going to be a most obliging brute that considerately bites one on the hospital doorstep and then loiters around in the moonlight waiting to be identified.

If the many keen intellects now engaged in trying to find a snake-bite panacea could discover one which could be administered in a more layman-like way, say in the form of a lotion, the mortality from snake-bites would show a remarkable decrease. As it is, the unfortunate victim, bitten many miles from medical attention or supplies, must do as best he can with local antidotes. The cutting of the flesh round the tiny

THE WHEELS OF IND

teeth punctures in the skin and thrusting in permanganate of potash is deemed efficacious. The placing of gunpowder on the wound thus made and fixing it to cause an explosion and blast out, as it were, the venom is another expedient thought to be efficient. If get-at-able it is recommended that the part bitten, say, a finger or toe, be immediately amputated in a despairing effort to dam the flow which is about to begin its last rapid journey through the veins to the heart. These and countless other measures, all more or less drastic, must be performed at feverish speed before the venom leaves the surface wound. The essence of a cure lies in rapidity of action to prevent the poison circulating and eventually to dispel it from the blood-stream. In the majority of cases, however, it is at the best a brave attempt to shut the stable door after the horse has gone. Vigorous health, enfeebled snakes, the happy combination of local treatment and a grim will, may and have won through, but in the main, after a deadly snake has bitten, the best efforts of the victim should be reserved for making his peace with his fellows, and the communication of his last desires, for his hours, nay, minutes, are irrevocably numbered.

In India much faith is placed in a mythical snake-stone, which gives its fortunate possessor absolute immunity from the bites of all the poison purveyors. As might be supposed, it is the snake himself 'which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head.' No one has seen a snake so adorned, but the legend has persisted for centuries, so it must be true.

In Bilaspur, a friend of mine once possessed a *mali*, or gardener, one of those creatures who potters around a piece of sun-baked earth with a watering-can and an everlasting optimism. Nevertheless, when com-

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

manded, he produces fresh blooms from somewhere with the inexplicable adeptness of an illusionist and with a gesture of conscious pride which plainly indicates, 'Alone I did it!' Some malicious persons say he steals the flowers from the overstocked nurseries of the wealthy *burra-sahibs* ; but perhaps that is only spite.

Our *mali* built a fire to burn garden refuse. During the night the fire died away and a warmth-loving cobra wriggled its way into the still warm embers and lay coiled in slumber. In the chilly dawn air, the *mali*, drowsy-eyed, went to the fire and with his bare foot kicked the cold embers in an effort to discover life in the pile. He found death. The awakened snake bit him in the big toe and slithered away.

The panic-stricken *mali* was carrying a sharp-edged garden tool and in a flash he brought it down and cut off his toe. He rushed howling with pain and terror to the *mem-sahib* who bandaged his wound and eventually stopped the bleeding. Corrective measures were taken and the *mali* was sent home for the day. The following morning he reappeared and poked amongst the dead ashes of his fire until he found that which he sought. Unfastening the lint and cloth which bound his foot, he stuck the missing toe, sodden with poison, on to the raw wound and replaced the bandages.

As the evening sun cast its long light down the dusty Indian road, it touched, as with fingers of benediction, upon the hurrying bearers of a rude bamboo bier, upon which lay the cotton-swathed corpse of the unfortunate *mali*, on its way to the funeral pyres of the burning *ghat*.



I was once going along the straggling, dusty road of a jungle village in the Central Provinces. Outside

THE WHEELS OF IND

the door of a mud hovel a man was making dolorous noises whilst a companion played monotonous notes on a snake-pipe. I inquired the cause of the strains. Inside lay a woman, dead from snake-bite. The two musicians outside were endeavouring to attract the snake back again. To kill it? Of course not! So that it would suck the poison out of the wound it had made and thus enable the dead to rise again. I made the perfectly obvious suggestion that if the snake was fool enough to come back to a spot where he could not possibly be at all popular, he would, no doubt, bite the deceased lady again to make sure or, in default, get one in on the two optimists outside. Far better, I hazarded, to go with a stick than a tin whistle to hunt snakes. My few remarks were received with that sickly smile of amused toleration for the sahibs' peculiar ideas, which generally appears on the faces of the country folk of India when their customs and beliefs are questioned. Owing to the superstitious beliefs held by the mass of those most likely to come into contact with snake life in India, every effort is made to preserve these destroyers of mankind.

In South Africa the protected Secretary-bird smashes to death with its powerful feet all members of the snake family it may come across. There is no such avian tornado in India. The balance of Nature is preserved, however, in other ways and in the van of serpent-extermimators in the Peninsula comes our friend the mongoose.

A sociable little fellow, he makes his quarters in many a bungalow like the domestic cat and in return for his board and lodging keeps away undesirable visitors such as snakes, rats and scorpions.

The common mongoose is a small weasel-like animal,

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

with a cosmopolitan appetite, and a body about 17 in. long, with another 12 in. added in the form of a tail. A dapper little chap in his salt-and-pepper suit, he inhabits the whole country from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. The curator of the Bombay Natural History Society, in holding a post-mortem on one luckless mongoose that had come to an untimely end, found that the animal had recently eaten a quail, a small wasp's nest, a lizard, a number of small insects and part of a custard apple, the last possibly by way of dessert. Sometimes, alas, he casts his little red beady eyes on domestic fowls and creates havoc amidst them, but his good deeds procure him absolution for these temporary lapses.

Of snakes and scorpions he is passionately fond and in his wild state he is a persistent hunter of them, particularly the former, and never refuses a fight should one come his way.

The two antagonists confront each other, the mongoose eyeing warily the fanged death in front of him. In sheer desperation the snake at last strikes and the agile little mongoose leaps to one side. A lightning return and the mongoose seizes the reptile's head, now thrust out near the ground, and in a twinkling crushes it with his sharp teeth.

Various fallacies still persist regarding the mongoose. Centuries of misinformed twaddle have brought about the belief that the animal is immune from snake poisons.

Aristotle and Pliny relate that the mongoose wallows in a mud bath which, caking hard, forms a protective armour against the attacks of the toothed wrigglers. Other observers, accepting the evidence of their eyes alone, state that, when bitten, the mongoose retires from the combat, and seeks an antidote, known in India as *Monguswail*. Others again more sweepingly

THE WHEELS OF IND

assert that the little fellow, in such a desperate strait, eats any herb or grass he can find, the gastric juices in his stomach performing some strange feat of alchemy by turning the green fodder into an immediate antidote.

Needless to remark, these statements are not true.

In the heat of combat, the mongoose erects his hair ; and this, combined with his tough, leathery skin and his remarkable agility, makes it extraordinarily difficult for the snake to get in a good and proper bite.

As a matter of fact the bald truth is that a mongoose well and truly bitten, well and truly dies.

At one time the serious depredations of rats in the sugar and fruit plantations of the West Indies were causing more havoc than the sugar-beet subsidy is doing to-day. At their wits' end, the planters imported the mongoose who is a born ratter.

Entering a virgin field, where his natural enemies swarmed, unaware through lack of experience of how to evade him, he went through the West Indies like a gory vacuum cleaner. The rats exterminated, like Alexander he looked around for other worlds to conquer. The remaining fauna of the islands was threatened with imminent extinction. Some species actually disappeared. Everything came as grist to his voracious mill. Then, either being satiated with flesh or experiencing difficulty in obtaining a sufficient supply, like a guest who has long outstayed his welcome, he developed a ravenous appetite for those things he had been imported to protect. Sugar-cane and fruit went down before him like snow before a thaw. The wholesale destruction of insect-eating birds brought in its train a plague of ticks. Together with men and cattle, the mongoose succumbed to the previously despised tick, and behold the balance of Nature once more correctly adjusted.

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

When the little mongoose first went to Jamaica and ate up all the rats he actually received honourable mention in Parliament. Towards the end of his gory progress it will be observed he was effectively 'ticked off.'

I once bought a mongoose in India for fourpence. Wasted money! He apparently didn't like me, or else he was too old to become domesticated. Anyhow, after biting my finger rather badly he cut his way through a wire-netting barrier, as if it had been cheese-cloth, and pushed off, doubtless back to his former owner, who would, I have no doubt, sell him again to another 'mug' for another fourpence.

'Bandar' was a small red monkey, who lived, fastened to a long chain, in a tree in the compound. One day he caught a luckless green grass-snake, harmless, of course, and I watched his movements with interest.

As the unsuspecting snake slithered past, he gripped it behind the head, in one lightning swoop. The snake was unable to move its head, and after 'Bandar' had lifted it up and surveyed it with owl-like solemnity for a few moments, he thrust it head downwards and rubbed it along the ground. After one or two rubs, he surveyed the progress of his work with the same grave countenance. Apparently satisfied, he commenced the rubbing business again. And so with alternate rubbings and contemplations he literally rubbed the head off the helpless snake, just as one might rub the head off a damp match. He then threw away the headless body as being of no further use to him and recommenced his normal occupation of gazing into space and attempting to look wise. No doubt in the jungle many snakes are thus accounted for by the *bandar-log*, who have just cause for hating them.

THE WHEELS OF IND

There is in India a certain caste who treat the snake with contempt, who seemingly laugh at his awful powers, who subject the snake, with all his sanctity, to the humility of being confined in a filthy bag, or basket, and to the indignity of being poked with a stick and made to rear and sway to a shrill piping for the amusement of white-skinned unbelievers.

As we sit on the verandah drinking tea, whilst the Western sky is filled with the glow of the dying day, Kasim announces that certain itinerant snake-charmers wish to amuse the sahibs. Presently three dirt-caked Indians appear and with low *salaams* and similar servilities squat on the ground before us. They take off a dingy cloth and expose two wicker baskets. The lids removed, two cobras lie coiled in a mass, their unwinking eyes sparkling in the softened sunlight. One performer produces his gourd pipe and proceeds to punish the ears with a succession of monotonous notes. The cobras are evidently sick of hearing the tune, but an assistant pokes them to movement with a stick and presently they uncoil and rear upwards, inflating their hoods with angry hiss, whilst their forked tongues for ever dart in and out. The third fellow now puts forth his hand and the cobras with lightning darts snap their jaws on the flesh. The drone of the pipe falls away and the snakes, after continuing their sway uncertainly for a few moments, with a spiral motion sink like ballet dancers into their baskets again. The bitten one rubs off the few specks of blood from his hand, looks at us rather anxiously, and replaces the lid.

In all but isolated cases the reptiles so contemptuously handled are previously prepared specimens. The fang teeth have been viciously and drastically pulled out by means of a piece of cloth and the wound and poison-bag have been burnt out by means of a hot

LIFE IN THE BILASPUR SETTLEMENT

iron. It sometimes happens, however, that the cauterization is not completely done or is neglected and the cobra, unsuspected, develops anew his venom and eventually really bites the unwitting mountebank. If this occurs there is usually a vacancy in the troupe!

There is no doubt that in the vast majority of cases where the snake-charmer professes to charm snakes from their holes he usually requires to put his own snake there first.

The compound of a friend of mine, in Bilaspur, was well supplied with snakes, particularly cobras, who lived in holes in a stone wall. One fellow, about 4 ft. long, was often seen and became so much of an anxiety that it was decided he should be asked to quit.

The visit of some snake-charmers offered a splendid opportunity. The head-man was shown the hole and offered a substantial remuneration for the production of the reptile.

“Very good, Sahib, I come to-morrow.”

He duly arrived with all the paraphernalia of his trade, a gourd pipe, a *doura* (a small hour-glass-shaped drum rattle) and an empty basket for the capture.

A quarter of an hour's incessant piping and the cobra popped up to see what all the row on his doorstep was about. As soon as the head appeared, the snake-charmer thrust forward his hand to pull the cobra out. He was a split-second too late. The snake bit his finger, and as its length came into view, the unfortunate fellow howled, panic-stricken :

“Sahib, Sahib, this is not my cobra.”

The lodger had apparently gone to sleep and the indignant owner had appeared and repaid in fearful coin the music put forth for his benefit. Luckily, on this occasion the hospital was near. The unlucky charmer received hypodermic injections and modern

THE WHEELS OF IND

treatment and soon was well again. After his release from hospital he had the audacity to go back and ask for the return of his tame dummy.

Whilst snakes of various types and degrees of deadliness are found in all parts of the country districts, those residing therein may go some time before encountering one ; but even so, the possibility is ever present and the wise man exercises vigilant precaution. In known snake-haunted localities, a careful eye must be kept on all likely resting-places, whilst feet must not be thrust hastily into shoes or slippers left overnight. Such footwear should first be knocked so as to disturb any unwanted tenants who may have crept in during the dark hours.

One morning in Bilaspur, being hurriedly called, I jumped from my bed and thrust my bare feet into slippers which lay near by. As I did so I felt something cold and clammy in the toe. I went all 'goosey' and threw off the slipper like a thing accursed. Instantly a fat green frog jumped out and hopped away and I breathed again.

This experience is not nearly so alarming as that of the fellow who retired to his bed in the small hours after drinking, if not wisely, at least too well.

He crept under the mosquito net and put his feet beneath the clothes. Immediately he felt something cold and soft with his left foot. His hair began to rise, whilst his body registered an alarming recurrent change of hot and cold. He looked down the bedclothes from above and saw a rise in the covering. Gingerly and afeard, he cautiously put his foot down once more and again felt the same cold clamminess. With a yell he dashed the bed-clothes from him and saw that which he had touched—his big toe on the other foot !

CHAPTER IV

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

IT is an accepted truism that 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.'

Whilst no doubt the multitudinous affairs of this large district could, and perhaps should, have occupied all our time, it is hardly to be expected that the call of the wild all about us should not, now and then, have coaxed us away to explore its mysteries. Once started on this quest, there is no turning back for the average fellow. The spell of the jungle and waste lands grows upon one, until, time and opportunity permitting, we find ourselves ultimately shackled to it. Almost every railway station on the 200 miles of branch line, from Bilaspur to Katni, offered its temptation of game, whilst the main line, running from East to West, presented delectable spots of animal-haunted jungle.

When the Bengal-Nagpur Railway administration first mooted the project of building a line from Bilaspur to connect up to Katni with the Great Indian Peninsula system, the Maharajah of Rewa, through whose territories the major portion of the proposed line would run, vetoed the suggestion. He alleged, amongst other things, that his game would be interfered with. The authorities, in order to get the sought-for concession, promised to preserve his game from the depredations of the outside world and even to-day, at periodical intervals, there are set out in the railway notices the drastic penalties enforceable if unauthorized interfer-

THE WHEELS OF IND

ence with the game stock of Rewa State is detected. The lapse of time has rendered this restriction a dead letter in respect to the lesser carnivora and other types of game, but the lord of the jungle, *Bagh*, the Tiger, still prowls and thrives in the Rewa jungles, shielded from interference by the threat of a fine of 1,000 rupees, the confiscation of arms and official action from headquarters against the unfortunate interloper who should, without authority, be so unwise as deliberately to shoot a tiger or unfortunate enough to be compelled to do so in self-defence in the State of Rewa. So any tiger to be found had to be sought for in the jungles of British India. No doubt, where these marched side by side with the borders of Rewa, the depleted stocks of the open area often received replenishment from the nurseries of the Native State.

The railroad track through Rewa ran through a perfect Zoological Garden in every meaning of the term, from the *Chital*, or spotted deer herds of Khongsara to the *Chinkera* and Black Buck of Jhalwara, with leopard, panther, black bear, *sambhur*, *nilghai* and numerous others at every station slung between, like the trail of a giant Noah's Ark that had leaked in its passing. Small wonder, then, that, rolling off at some wayside station to investigate a delay or an accident, or maybe a case where some misguided Assistant Station Master had played fast and loose with the Railway cash, I was often inveigled into chasing these denizens of the wooded lands which came down to the verge of the track. In any case the paucity of trains to take me home again often left me with some leisure time after my job was completed, and to remove my presence from the station staff, who were no doubt sick of seeing me, I hied myself to the trail.

In the good old early days, when some prize speci-

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

men was sighted from the track, it was nothing unusual for the entire train crew to leave the freight train in the middle of the section for hours whilst they tally-hoed over the surrounding countryside after their objective. The trophy secured, they returned triumphant to the train and continued on their way.

There is a story told of a locomotive driver taking his train over the *ghaut* or hill sections of the Bilaspur-Katni line some years ago. Ahead, along the track, his vigilant eye detected a tiger, busy over its kill by the side of the single line. Shutting off steam, he brought the train to a stand and, grasping his rifle, always carried on the foot-plate, he moved off into the jungle and detoured until he was at right angles to the huge cat absorbed in its meal.

A careful shot, and the body was dragged on to the engine and skinned as the train pushed on its way towards Katni. The carcass was fed into the fire-box and utterly consumed, the skin was rolled up and hidden under the coal in the tender and all evidence of the poached tiger thoroughly removed from the foot-plate. Satisfied and exultant, the enthusiastic *shikari*-cum-driver brought his train to a stand at his destination. To his consternation and alarm, on the platform stood two stalwart bearded forest officers of Rewa State. They spoke with him. A tiger had been slaughtered that day in Rewa near the railway and they wished to examine the engine. They made a thorough search, but the damning evidence hidden under tons of coal escaped them. Suspicious, no doubt, but helpless, they withdrew and the driver breathed again. After much labour, he retrieved the blood-stained pelt from its dusty hiding-place and, taking the first passenger train to Calcutta, handed it over to the care of a taxidermist. Doubtless, he afterwards felt more pride in that

THE WHEELS OF IND

pilfered pelt than he did in many others legitimately obtained.

Those halcyon, care-free days of railway working on the branch lines of jungle India, however, have gone for ever. To-day, the insistent demands of modern industry and railroad operation preclude such joyous escapades; and rare trophies flaunting themselves to the covetous gaze of sporting train crews must only be looked at in passing and their destruction postponed for some more propitious occasion.

My stable companion had, prior to my arrival in India, purchased a new .405 Winchester repeater. Taking it down to the Bilaspur range to try out, he was kicked on the jaw so viciously at the first shot that, thoroughly scared, he never put another round through it. On my arrival, he endeavoured to do a deal. His anxiety to get rid of the white elephant overcame his Scottish instinct to drive a hard bargain, and after a little cross-haggling we completed the sale. This weapon I found thoroughly reliable. I had perfect confidence behind it. The only empirical objection I developed towards it was that, despite diligent and meticulous oiling and cleaning, the under-arm action, however careful the manipulation, gave one or two distinct clicks. This slight noise was not so objectionable during the daytime, but at night, when the slightest sound is fatal, it was particularly irritating. This rifle, together with a 12-bore shot-gun, composed my armoury.



What is it about the jungle that fascinates and attracts? The very sound of the word to stay-at-homes is sufficient to conjure up vistas of deep dark vegetation, peopled by sinister forms which exist but to batten

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

on the intruder. A mad riot of colour, siren-like, allures the wanderer to meander beneath its canopies and then suddenly confronts him with some stark horror of the wild. Centuries of lore and story have envisaged for us a fairy picture of tropic jungles ; of a myriad host of giant trees battling for sheer existence amidst a chaotic mass of undergrowth ; of huge liana creepers twisting and turning until they form each a part of some Gargantuan puzzle, impenetrable, sinister, foreboding, yet beckoning to the curious with promise of the unknown ; of serpents slithering about the limbs of trees ; of ruthless beasts of prey, waiting and watching, rending and tearing ; of miasmal vapours, fever-laden, hanging like a pall of death in the steaming growth ; of gorgeous orchids flaunting their vivid glory from a thousand points, blooming unseen in the depths of the wild ; of 6-in. butterflies like patterned tapestry and burnished gold floating on iridescent wings from one gilded lily to another whilst up above, amidst the gloomy aisles or cleaving through a cloudless sky of vivid blue, flash pin-point humming birds or dazzling trogons. Truly the scene is attractive ! As a fairy picture, maybe, but such are not the jungles of the Central Provinces of India as I remember them.



Of the sweltering swamps of the Sunderbands, the bamboo barriers of Burma, the amazing chaos of the Amazon, the colour of the Congo and the stark beauty of Sumatra, I can say nothing. Even the palm and bamboo forests of Southern India, and the magnificent jungles of the Terai which roll along the foothills of the Himalayas, are to me a closed book.

Much wandering, however, in the wilds of the Central Provinces puts me on to more certain ground.

THE WHEELS OF IND

What picture does the mirror of memory reflect? Stretches of forest of varying trees, depending upon the character of the soil, but all of types which thrive in dry areas, such as *sal*, *dhaura*, *khair*, or the ubiquitous cotton-wood. These sparsely cover the ground from horizon to horizon, with here and there large open spaces or parklands, beloved of the deer and other grazers. Outcrops of black rock rise to respectable hillocks here and fall into narrow valleys or *nullahs* there.

Rivers and brooks find their way through these hundreds of lonely, untrodden miles. In the rainy season these watercourses are raging torrents of yellow water, furiously carrying all before them in their headlong career to the ocean far away.

In the hot weather the same stream-beds are huge wastes of rock and sand, a thin trickle of water in parts linking up like a giant chain the stranded pools which dry up one by one as the hot season slowly drags along.

To trudge through these miles of sand in a blazing tropical sun, with a rifle that like an incubus gradually gets heavier and heavier till one hates the sight of the thing, is an aspect of jungle life which is usually absent from our fireside picture.

My mirror reflects few butterflies, flowers or birds. Perhaps my mind was too much occupied with other matters to pay more than passing attention to things immediately around me. Except two, the heat and the flies. These, like the poor, were ever with us. Streaming from every pore, oft-times nearly blinded by the sweat which poured into my eyes from my sweltering topee, with millions of minute flies continually shepherding my every step, life seemed just one damned thing after another.

I recollect once lying in a depression in the ground,



By courtesy, The Bengol-Vagpur Railway Co., Ltd

WOODED PARKLANDS IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

awaiting the arrival of prospective customers in the shape of black bear. My weapon, the .405 Winchester, was laid on the ground in front of me. Suddenly the time for action came and I swiftly snatched up my rifle, grasping with one hand the barrel. Instantly I dropped it. It was untouchable—burning hot. I merely record the fact ; my language on that occasion I leave unmentioned.

Possibly the open was preferable to the shade, for there the remainder of the unnumbered host of flies hovered around, waiting Micawber-like, for something to turn up. Whatever turned up soon turned out again.

What is there, then, about such spots that time and again draws one back to undergo these fatigues and inconveniences ? To trudge mile after mile in sweltering heat, through wooded spots deserted and silent, through clinging sands which make walking a misery, struggling up steep rocky slopes blistering in the sun, fording through swamps and streams (I once fell in a deep jungle river twice in the same day) and harassed by merciless insects ? And reward is not by any means assured. One does not go into the jungle and see game on every occasion. Like a sundial I only record the sunny hours, not those when, tramping from sunrise to sunset, I saw nothing which occasioned a second glance.

Just as the passage of time with kindly fingers effaces from the slate of the past our little disappointments and difficulties but leaves unblemished the recollections of happiness and success, so does one remember the jungle. The hardships are forgotten and swallowed up in the all-embracing memories of the glorious dawns and sunsets, of plans successfully matured, of wonders seen and curious things explored, of intriguing aspects of jungle lore explained by friendly natives.

THE WHEELS OF IND

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast," sings the poet, and it is this ethereal will-o'-the-wisp which brings men again and again to the wild. I suppose it is a latent instinct with all of us, however, much as we may have been cradled in cities and confined by walls to get back to primitive Nature and revel in the freedom which it offers.

And nowhere more than in the jungle is this sense of unrestricted liberty vouchsafed us.



In the chilly pre-dawn air we gathered together the crowd of jungle natives who were to beat for us, and moved off through the awakening Khongsara jungles to the river-bed about half a mile away.

Startled shapes slipped past in the half-light : spotted deer and *sambhur* returning from the feeding-lands outside and an occasional hyena or jackal slinking away home like a belated reveller ashamed to be seen in the light of day. We crunched through the sand, and half-way across a companion stopped me and pointed. Coming over, about 300 yards to our left, was a black panther. He saw us and crouched down on the sand, awaiting developments. Black panthers, by the way, are freak births, not a distinct species. See a black panther stand in a certain light and the spots under the black are visible.

We stopped and watched each other. I suggested taking a shot, but another companion pointed out that he possessed a wife and children and I neither. This seemed a sound argument and as a panther has a way on occasion of making wives widows we postponed the meeting and reluctantly passed on in opposite directions.

Over the river-bed we slung out the beaters and took up our several stations to await whatever the

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

Gods might send. Nothing exciting happened, so far as I was concerned, except that down a clearing came a little fellow with a striped back and short legs. He ambled along totally unconcerned. Just as he was about to pass by, he spotted me and in alarm turned off at right angles and endeavoured to get through a clump of bamboo. He was the camel and the bamboo the needle's eye. The more he struggled, the more he stuck. I lost his front quarters, but his back legs and little tail waggled frantically.

Up to this moment I hadn't placed him, but in sheer desperation and irritation he squeaked and grunted, and I then knew he was the fellow who usually makes his appearance escorted with sage and onions and apple sauce.

I hit him with a piece of wood on the spot where the seat of his trousers would have been, had he been wearing trousers, and thus assisted he managed to get through. With a final waggle of his tail and a derisive grunt he scampered off home to mother.

Another day, I went down this same river-bed with Biggs, a friend of mine, one of the finest shots in all India, with nerves of steel and an inexhaustible knowledge of big-game lore. We were to visit some caves supposed to be inhabited by panthers. We approached the spot and Biggs advised caution whilst we reconnoitred. The sand was trodden down and covered with *pug* or feet marks, whilst we picked up several panther hairs in the course of our investigations. Suddenly Biggs growled, "Steady, Mitchell! There are two eyes watching us from within the cave. Back out as far as you can and leave this to me." Still bending down, I did as commanded and backed out feeling extremely 'goosey' all over. As I got to a safe distance, my companion swung himself erect, simul-

THE WHEELS OF IND

taneously bringing his rifle to his shoulder and squeezing the trigger. Fascinated, I watched a particularly fine piece of work. Slap between the two unknown eyes went the bullet and the green lights went out. "O.K., Mitchell," breathed Biggs, and we approached the cave. Just inside the deep dark patch we found the body and hauled it out. And then we laughed. Instead of a sleek body, orange and black, we saw the dingy coat and uncouth form of a hyena ! And the smell—Ye Gods !

Still, there might have been no smell, but the fury of a panther behind those two sinister eyes of green, and there is no missing and trying again with *Bagheera* the killer.



I had just passed through a small jungle village in the Khongsara jungles shortly after dawn when to my disappointment I found I had forgotten my cigarettes. I mentioned my loss to the old *shikari* who was always with me, and he immediately left the straggling path and pulled a leaf from a tobacco plant growing in the cultivated patch. He rolled the green leaf to the rough shape of a cigar and bent one end upwards to form a crude pipe. In the hole he placed some dried native weed from his pouch and offered me this jungle-fashioned pipe. I placed one end of the green monster in my mouth and lit the other. So far, so good. I then drew the smoke into my lungs. That far, no good. I thought somebody had kicked me. Coughing and spluttering, with a feeling that the end of the world had arrived, I handed the depth-charge back to the old man. Smilingly he placed the vile thing in his mouth and smoked it to the end, which only goes to prove that what is one man's meat is another man's poison.

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

Many times had this old *shikari* and I roamed through these jungles, by day and by night, at sunset and at dawn. Always I found him unperturbed, alert, efficient and a master of jungle craft. Clad only in his loin-cloth, armed only with his bow, he tramped long miles with me or sat the whole night through over some salt-lick or game-path. His back was a mass of old-time battle-wounds, the result of conflict with tooth and claw, and he had lost both his sons by tiger.

We stood in a shady game-track, examining the pug marks of those who had passed before. The old man read them like a book, *sambhur*, *chital*, 'barking deer,' 'blue bull,' or *bara-singha*, not only indicating their species, but embellishing his catalogue with sundry details as to sex, approximate size and how long gone, and hazarding guesses as to their probable whereabouts, which, more often than not, proved remarkably uncanny in their accuracy.

"Oh, yes," I remarked, "I see how you can tell the various animals by their varied footprints, and you can guess where they are going by your experience and knowledge of the district, but how can you tell a male deer from a female by its footprints?"

"Sahib," said the old man, "the head of the stag is heavier than that of the hind and therefore its fore-feet impress more heavily than the hind-feet, whilst all the four feet of the hind imprint alike."

We passed on to a small *jheel*, or jungle pond, where we hoped to find some wild duck. Our suspicions were correct. A few dozen were swimming about in the centre of the water and a stone thrown into their midst soon set them up. Round and round they went, the circle widening with each circuit, until I could distinguish their separate feather colours. With diminished ranks they still continued their merry-go-round, even-

THE WHEELS OF IND

tually scudding along the surface of the water. Again I let fly with both barrels, whereupon the survivors beat a hasty retreat to another *jheel*, about half a mile away, where we proposed to follow them. A small *chowkra*, or native boy, retrieved the dead and wounded and promptly proceeded to make the latter like the former by screwing their heads off. I was rather alarmed to see one or two of these ruthlessly decapitated ducks get up and run a few yards before finally collapsing, thus delivering up their heads before giving up the ghost.

After paying a visit to the second stretch of water we retraced our steps and passed by the first pond. Here we found a little black urchin sobbing bitterly. We inquired the cause of his tears and found that a water buffalo in his charge had walked out of the water after our departure with blood coming out of its nostrils, and he was rather terrified at the thought of what would await him when he got back home. We saw what had happened. The water buffalo, true to tradition, had gone into the middle of the *jheel* and submerged to nose-tip and as the duck skimmed across the surface a stray pellet had found a billet in the nose of the water-baby, whose presence, of course, we had never suspected. We examined the animal and found it unharmed and totally unconcerned. As a matter of fact, judging from the noise the cowboy made, one would have thought that *he* had stopped the pellets. We dried his tears and brought smiles of wonder to his face by giving him a rupee, a coin which doubtless he had never seen before and had certainly never possessed or hoped to possess. Thus fortified, he reeled away, drunk with wealth, to recover his sobriety and lose his coin immediately he got home.

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

India possesses two kinds of wild pig, the black and the red, and my district was fortunate in affording habitation to both types. In many parts of the country our porcine friend is ridden down on horses and despatched by spears, but in the Central Provinces, owing to the nature of the land (much of it being black cotton soil), riding is too dangerous, so the pig is kept in check by means of the rifle.

The porker of India is a rapacious brute, destructive and plucky, and he roams in herds which, in a single night, may destroy the labour of months in the 'paddy-fields' and sugar plantations. It is not to be wondered at, then, that the jungle dweller delights to decrease the numbers of these desperadoes and willingly assists in their slaughter.

Usually the *soor*, as he is called, is inoffensive so far as men are concerned, but on occasion he can be very dangerous. Woe betide the unfortunate who falls in the path of an infuriated piece of pork, for the sharp hooves cut like razors, whilst the tusks of Old Man Boar are not pleasant to come into contact with, as a fatality list of eighty-five in a single recent twelve-month amply proves.

At Jhalwara I often lay face downwards over a little culvert under the railway line and watched the wild pig streaming through, just after dawn, back to the jungle again after spending the night foraging in the fields where the harassed cultivators from their elevated bamboo watch-towers had sought in vain with noisy shout and rattle of empty tins to scare the harvest-snatchers away.

At times one meets a solitary boar, an old patriarch who has lorded it for years over a harem and successive families of youngsters. Eventually he sires a better fighter than himself and the old man, soundly thrashed,

THE WHEELS OF IND

is turned out of hearth and home whilst his throne is occupied by an ungrateful and usurping offspring. The old man maybe attempts to dispossess some other tyrant. If he fails in this endeavour, he cuts himself adrift from his kith and kin and lives alone, morose and bad tempered, at war with all the world, ready to tackle and fight anything and everything to which his wicked little eyes take a dislike. Even the tiger hesitates to dispute the right of way with such Ishmaels.

One evening, again at Jhalwara, I took a shot-gun with the intention of shooting a peacock for dinner. I hid behind a thick thorn bush whilst a few village lads beat out the jungle for what I sought. Presently, I heard a tramping ahead and surmised peafowl, for these birds make an amazing noise when approaching. Nearer and nearer came the sound and I crept round the bush expecting to see a long-tailed, gaudy peacock strutting out. To my astonishment I saw instead, two or three yards away, a huge, solitary boar, his red eyes looking wickedly into mine.

He was surprised, and so was I.

I got the 'wind up,' and he didn't.

After a second's hesitation, he lowered his head and came for me. Instinctively I put my gun to my hip and pulled both triggers. At that range it was impossible to miss. He got the contents of both barrels smack in the face and, with a grunt of rage and pain, rushed past me. With the speed of a train he charged up a steep slope to the right and disappeared from my view for ever.

On another occasion a companion and I were skirting an area of tall elephant-grass when, without warning, a boar dashed out and went through my companion's legs like lightning. As he passed through, he jerked his head upwards. My friend was fortunately

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

wearing thick puttees and riding-breeches, yet these were slit right up and an ugly red line on the skin showed how near those sharp tusks had been to victory.

On occasions like these bow legs are a decided advantage.



We were lying in wait in the Himgir jungles. The beaters had been driving the game towards us for the last hour and soon something was likely to happen. We were three guns and we were optimistic that our bag would be substantial. Nearer and nearer came the beaters, but nothing of any importance turned out to justify our optimism.

Suddenly, at right angles to the drive and parallel with the guns, a she-bear came barging along like a lumbering cart-horse. As she went past, every rifle was discharged at her, but gallantly she continued her headlong career and I was hopeful she was going to win through to safety. As she passed the last outpost, to the amazement of us all, she turned round and retraced her fiery trail again, doubtless thoroughly bewildered by the noise and fire.

Back again she came, to fall half-way down the line with four bullets in her. There she lay, a huge mass of black hair, out in the blazing sun, until the arrival of the beaters assured us the shoot was a 'wash-out,' when we left our posts to inspect the body.

Whilst we stood around, a native shouted that there was a *batcher baloo* (young bear) entangled in a thicket. The mother bear had been carrying her youngster on her back, whilst the lad hung on with his teeth to her thick neck hair. The impact of that last bullet which stopped the career of the gallant matron had dislodged the jockey from his mount and hurled him into his

THE WHEELS OF IND

prickly couch where he lay 'doggo' until discovered. We crowded round and when he saw us he commenced to bite and snap and utter baby growls. We tried to capture him bare-handed, but soon discovered his sharp teeth were not to be trifled with. We threw a blanket over him and hauled him out. As soon as we uncovered him he made one dash for a companion's boot and with one tug pulled the sole clean off. This seemed to satisfy his destructive instinct, but to be on the safe side we rolled him up again and eventually got him home where he stayed as a lodger for many months.

This particular morning was enlivened by another incident.

As soon as Biggs realized nothing was to be got from the beat, he picked up his shot-gun and fired at some approaching peafowl.

As the noise of the gun died away the air was filled with the howls of a beater, who was heard declaiming to all and sundry that he was dead and the sahib had killed him. With an eye no doubt to possible indemnity in the way of many rupees, he continued his clamour and rolled about the ground in so violent a manner as to give the lie direct to his previous statement that he had departed from this planet.

Biggs turned pale when he heard the shrieks, as it is a serious matter to kill or maim a beater.

We hurried forwards in fear and trepidation.

The fellow was still rolling on the ground, his companions standing around, looking like mutes at a funeral, but inwardly rejoicing as prospective sharers of their lucky pal's windfall in the shape of sahib's blood-money.

Biggs anxiously knelt down and found that one small, solitary pellet had just penetrated the skin of the howling one's stomach. It had not even drawn blood. In relief and irritation Biggs dislodged the tiny piece of

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

lead with his finger and thumb. Soundly boxing the malingerer's ears, he told him to stop bleating and get up.

His pals grinned when the cheat was discovered. However keen they may have been to share his hoped-for gains, they showed no anxiety to queue up to participate in what he actually received.



One of the first principles of jungle shooting is never to fire a shot until one is sure what one is firing at, and another is (circumstances allowing) that sufficient of the target should be visible to enable a satisfactory hit to be registered. A snap shot at a patch of yellow glinting through the undergrowth might mean an easy victim in the shape of some harmless deer, or on the other hand a most formidable customer in the shape of a wounded tiger or panther, maddened with rage and pain and seeking for anything moving upon which to vent a tornado of fury.

I well remember my first kill. It was the first time I had been into the jungles and the place was named Umaria. I was enthusiastic and keen and anxious to acquit myself well in the eyes of my more experienced companions. They proposed putting me up a tree, obviously on the assumption I would be out of harm's way. I definitely and flatly refused to emulate Zaccheus, and from this attitude I never varied in all my jungle campaigns. I argued that on the ground one had a better view of things ahead and more opportunity for correct alignment. I realized the element of danger increased the nearer one got to the level of the beasts, but I appreciated the risks of the thing and stated that if the balance was always going to be heavily weighted in my favour then the game wasn't worth the candle.

THE WHEELS OF IND

My views were accepted. Anyhow, they said, it was my 'pidgin,' although they felt a sort of moral responsibility for me until I had cut my wisdom teeth and progressed from the puppy stage. They therefore placed me behind a small bush with strict orders not to fire unless I distinctly saw what I aimed at, to fire to kill and on no account to fire indiscriminately on my flanks and so, maybe, kill *them*. Also, to refrain from potting the poor *harka-wallahs*, or beaters, who would be approaching me in about half an hour's time.

They went to take up their own positions and left me to my own devices.

The thrills of anticipation, the tense expectation of the first sight of game approaching, unsuspecting, nearer and nearer, the first faint calls of the 'beaters' tramping out the jungle, their cries increasing in volume and bursting into staccato shouts of warning as certain carnivora are sighted, I describe more fully in a further chapter.

I remembered the axiom, 'Make a sound if you wish to be foolish, but on no account be such a complete idiot as to move.' The animals work on three danger signals, scent, sound and sight, and usually the latter is relied upon most.

So, crouched under the bush, I flattened myself into its shade, the khaki of my shooting-kit merging into the burnt brown of the sun-stricken foliage.

Ahead was a glade about fifty yards long made into a cul-de-sac by a large flame-of-the-forest tree whose gaudy flowers flaunted their scarlet glory to the heat-baked trees below.

Staring and staring, until I became almost wall-eyed, I gazed into the deep shadow of the flame tree. Suddenly I looked again with astonishment. Without any perceptible sign of its approach, in the manner of an

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

illusion, I became aware that something more solid than shadow stood before me. Seemingly motionless, yet obviously moving, a beautiful spotted stag stood outlined in the shade. At the time its beauty, whilst noted and appreciated, made little appeal to me.

Slowly I raised my rifle, took careful aim at the base of the neck stretched towards me and squeezed the trigger.

Down crumpled the deer, like a collapsed house of cards. With the enthusiasm of a schoolboy, wild with delight I dashed forward up the glade, to see my first trophy. As I gazed at the fallen deer, which had passed out instantaneously, the leader of our party came along.

"Well, Mitchell," he said, "you've done extremely well at your first effort, but never again do what you did. You dashed out from your cover, recklessly and heedlessly, and for all you knew to the contrary, a tiger or a panther might have been following up the stag and when you suddenly barged into view, like a bolt from the blue, might have strongly resented your interference in no uncertain manner. If the stag was dead, it couldn't run away; and if you had missed it, and ran for ten years you couldn't catch it; so in future, whatever you shoot, let it lie until the beaters come up and you are assured everything is normal again."

This was sound *shikari* advice which I never forgot.



Another sound *shikari* rule is to familiarize oneself with the distinctive markings and characteristics of the fauna which one may reasonably expect to find in the particular area to be visited. This knowledge, of course, is best gained by experience and my lack of

THE WHEELS OF IND

the latter was, on one occasion, responsible for a disappointing day.

I had expressed a desire to get a *sambhur* deer, the largest member of the deer family in India. A subordinate officer of mine took me to the Himgir jungles, where he hoped to find that which we sought. He placed me behind a large stone opposite a sharp declivity in the ground, about twenty yards away. To my right was a game-track, down which, he assured me, the game would come. When they reached the edge of the step-like declivity they would stand before taking the jump and that few moments of hesitation would present me with an excellent opportunity. He left a native *shikari* with me and went elsewhere to take up his position. Minutes passed and the beat progressed. Suddenly I heard the thudding of feet on the hard ground and I trained my rifle on the gap in the trees. Presently a deer, dark and as large as a horse, stopped in its stride.

"Shoot, Sahib!" whispered my companion.

I noticed the deer had apparently no horns and, judging it to be a youngster, did not fire. The deer, unconscious of its proximity to death, took the leap and carried on into the jungle beyond. Again the thudding of hoofs, the stop, the same entreaty to shoot from the *shikari*, the same respite from a crashing bullet for the same reason, and the same uninterrupted progress to the forest behind. Nothing more came, until my companion rolled up.

"Why didn't you fire, sir? I could have bagged them both, but left them for you, as I knew you hadn't seen one before."

"No fear, Dinger," I replied. "You don't catch me shooting immature *sambhur* stags."

"They were not *sambhur*, they were full-grown 'blue-

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

bull,' and you'll be lucky if you ever get them so near again."

Then I remembered the 'blue-bull,' that enigma of the fauna of India, neither cow nor deer, with its two tiny horns and white-ringed feet and realized that, owing to my lack of practical knowledge, I had let two pass as young *sambhur*. However, I consoled myself with the thought that owing to my mistake two 'blue-bull' were enjoying life, when otherwise they would have been two useless lumps of hide and flesh.



How does the Indian black buck differentiate between a village native and a white man and allow the former to approach within effective rifle range whilst the sight of the latter at four or five hundred yards sends him scampering away? Does the animal know the white man carries a long-distance weapon and the Indian only a short-range bow and arrow? And yet the extent of its reasoning is limited. Place the same rifle across the head, supported by both arms upraised in the manner of a native carrying wood and, more often than not, the poor fool of a black buck is so bamboozled that in doubt and hesitation he watches the hybrid apparition until the smack of the bullet settles his doubting for all time.

Do animals philosophize on man's chivalry or communicate to each other the more humane aspects of the code of *shikar*?

It is general knowledge that the shooting of females and immature males of the deer tribe is not recognized. (In the case of the carnivora, of course, being a member of the so-called weaker sex is no protection.) Advantage is sometimes taken of the immunity of the

THE WHEELS OF IND

female by the stag for his own protection as was strikingly demonstrated one day, near Khongsara.

We were skirmishing through some jungles when, parting the leaves of the last outpost of trees prior to entering a large piece of grassland, we observed a herd of *chital* grazing, as usual, in the centre far away from any cover. Through the glasses we counted them, seven females, two immature males and three full-grown stags, each with a fine spread of antlers. The three stags were keeping watch over the ladies, who grazed unperturbed. Obviously no danger was anticipated or suspected. We discussed the situation. At that range shooting was out of the question. Only a chance lucky shot would be effective. Stalking them over hard open ground was practically out of the question. The suspicious stags would never let us approach near enough. In our dilemma the old *shikari* proffered his advice.

"Sahibs," he said, "I will place you in a spot where I can drive that herd so near that you will be almost able to touch them."

He took us back through the jungle to a place consisting of two small hummocks a few feet high and asked us to lie on the top and await the coming of the herd. His men he sent off to scare the *chital* in our direction and gradually work them into the little valley in which we lay.

At the end of half an hour, a brown head came round the corner, then another, and another, until the little depression was filled with the heaving bodies of *chital* deer, almost too crowded to move, like cattle in a corral or elephant in the khedah. Amazed, we watched them streaming in. Disgusted, we counted them. Seven females, two immature stags and a porcupine that, apparently imbued with a spirit of curiosity, had come along with the crowd to see what was astir. The

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

old *shikari* was right. We literally touched some of the animals, but, of course, otherwise left them alone. Finding that the gentlemen were too shy, or too knowing, to attend the gathering, we closed the meeting and allowed the ladies and youngsters to disperse and go home again, doubtless to pick up their missing lords elsewhere.

Whether we are to apportion the praise to the timidity or the astuteness of the stags, or to the recklessness or stupidity of their harem, it is difficult to say, but it is a known fact that on occasions such as these the stags often leave the hinds to fend for themselves.



Ram Jam was a rascal. Of that there was no doubt. He was, on occasion, a knave too, but that took more proving. Officially and ostensibly he was the contractor in charge of the coaling of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway Co.'s locomotives at Sahdol. Actually he was a deep-dyed poacher and a night-flitter, a doer of dark and mysterious deeds in the jungles of his lordship the Maharajah of Rewa.

Ram Jam possessed a single-barrel Stevens 12-bore gun procured from heaven knows where. He always alleged that a sahib gave it to him, but his sceptical listeners, knowing his insatiable craving for arms and the chase, thought otherwise. I may be doing Ram Jam an injustice, but I feel that in the matter of the gun he greatly prevaricated. Alas for Ram Jam ! He possessed no licence with his 12-bore, and in a country where the holding of modern weapons by other than Europeans and higher-class Indians is not encouraged, the lack of documentary title to his weapon prevented him from obtaining the one essential to its continued use—ammunition. A gun without cartridges is like an

THE WHEELS OF IND

Army canteen without beer, ornamental no doubt, but its sphere of usefulness woefully prescribed.

Before one can purchase cartridges in India, it is essential that the licence be produced so that it can be suitably endorsed. The absence of the requisite form left poor Ram Jam grievously short of the requisite—to wit, cartridges, and he would rise to any height of puerile sycophancy to wheedle them from some adulation-loving sahib or descend to any depth of deceit and trickery to pinch them.

I have alluded to the fact that Ram Jam was a rascal, but as everyone, including himself, knew it, no great harm was done. He was, however, an extremely likeable rascal. His round fat face was usually beaming and his lips parted in a huge grin which displayed to great advantage his betel-nut-stained teeth. Amongst a people usually devoid of any outward semblance of hilarity and joyous spirits, Ram Jam stood out the more conspicuous, and one rather looked forward to seeing his laughter-wreathed face at Sahdol and to hearing his trite gossip and blatant twaddle couched in the most remarkable English. After inquiring in an apparently most sincere way as to the sahib's health and future movements, Ram Jam launched his invariable request—ammunition. He would detail in mouth-watering anticipation the unnumbered hosts of deer anxiously waiting for him, the myriads of fowl parked at some spot known only to himself and the holocaust only delayed by his lack of projectiles. Hadn't the sahib any he didn't want?

He would pay for them, of course, or in default would see the sahib got dozens of wild duck or a couple of deer or something of that nature. I verily believe that, if pressed, Ram Jam would have promised an elephant or two. As a matter of fact his promises were

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

without limit, seeing he had no intention of fulfilling them. At one time and another he must have promised me almost a complete zoo, so perhaps it was just as well. Had his promises materialized they might have proved most inconvenient. I hesitate to say how many condemned cartridges we palmed off on to Ram Jam and blush to think how we hypocritically accepted his profuse thanks and sham promises. The whole thing was a hollow mockery, but carried out with the best of intentions. However that may be, Ram Jam blazed off our 'dud' ammunition to his heart's content without hurt to himself or his connections, which goes to prove that bairns and fools do receive special dispensation.

He went around the near-by jungles and preserves like a local Halley's comet, leaving a trail of death in his wake and occasionally falling foul of the Maharajah of Rewa's game-wardens for these same death-dealing activities.

It is unnecessary to mention that no shoot at Sahdol was complete without Ram Jam. As a matter of fact it was impossible to avoid taking him. He simply attached himself, uninvited, as if it went without saying that his presence was absolutely essential, and before one realized it Ram Jam would be at his old games and borrowing (I use the word in its widest sense) cartridges *ad infinitum*.

On one particular occasion we penetrated into the Sahdol jungles for some miles. Reaching suitable country we flung out the beaters and, taking up our positions, awaited developments.

We had not long to wait.

Shortly after the beat had commenced we heard the cry of "*Bagh*," and every native within sound of the warning immediately shinned up the first available tree. The great Ram Jam was near me on my left, and I

THE WHEELS OF IND

presently looked up and saw him grinning down from the safety of a 'flame' tree. His grins, however, changed to consternation and his eyes stood out like boiled eggs as from the near-by forest walked the lord of the jungle, to stand under the tree in which Ram Jam had perched himself. Ram Jam lay 'possum,' and I, seated behind a small bush within a stone's throw of the tiger, also remained mute. Ram Jam looked a ridiculous figure as he hung, pop-eyed, asprawl the tree limb directly overhead the unsuspecting beast. Not that there was any danger of his falling. Judging by the way he clung on, nothing short of cutting down the tree would have separated Ram Jam from his support. I daren't laugh, in case the tiger took me for a laughing hyena and came round to investigate. In such an event, of course, I would most decidedly have laughed on the other side of my face. Eventually the tiger moved off again and I invited the modern Zaccheus to come down. When he did, he was most indignant because I hadn't shot the tiger.

"What about the thousand-rupees fine, Ram Jam?" I asked.

He made a gesture of disgust and contempt.

"I'd have fixed things," said he, with an air that seemed to convey that he and the Maharajah of Rewa were as one.

I measured the imprint of one of the tiger's fore-feet, left in the patch of sand on which he had stood, and found they were just the stretch of one hand and the thickness of two fingers. From this it is evident Ram Jam had been poised precariously over a fair good portion of muscle and brawn.

We moved off again after some *sambhur* deer and were just making contact when the cry went up that a tiger, either the same or another, was mauling a

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

beater. In my haste to hurry forward to see what was wrong, the flap of my shirt pocket became undone and I dropped out a live .405 Winchester cartridge. After everyone except the tiger had been satisfactorily accounted for, I made search for the missing cartridge, but without success, and eventually went home, a hundred miles away, without it.

Weeks afterwards I heard from Ram Jam the tale of the missing *goli* (cartridge).

Unblushingly he confessed how he had returned to the wilds after my departure, to retrieve the cartridge which he had previously found and put to one side in case I stumbled across it. Returning with his prize, he commandeered the assistance of another poacher type, one, however, who was a true crude son of the soil, unversed in the subtleties and cunning of that higher stratum of civilization in which Ram Jam moved and had his being.

Ram Jam had no weapon capable of taking the greatly prized, high-explosive cartridge, but his innocent dupe possessed a home-made gas-pipe gun, one of those instruments of destruction which always leaves the sportsman in a state of uncertainty as to which end the charge is coming out. Quite a sporting weapon, of course! To fire it is a gamble, with the odds on both ways, or both ends!

So off they went into the night: Ram Jam, armed with his ill-gotten cartridge and his craftiness, and his satellite with his portable death-trap and an unwavering faith in his companion in destruction. They arrived at their objective, a small jungle pool, dark and silent, redolent of death in many forms. They took up their position and, utterly devoid of all qualms regarding the ethics of *shikar*, erected the fire-tube.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Labour, in the shape of the innocent, rammed down a charge of home-made powder, followed by a miscellaneous conglomeration of old nails, pieces of wire and scrap metal ; whilst Capital, in the guise of Ram Jam, offered the .405 Winchester high-explosive cartridge which entered the bore of the blunderbuss along with the other oddments and represented Ram Jam's contribution to the venture.

The gun thus loaded was placed on a tripod and the business end pointed towards the pool.

A team of two is required to manage the fearsome contraption. One holds the butt of the gun steady to his shoulder whilst the other applies a spark to the touch-hole at the psychological moment. There was no queue for the post of honour, and incidentally of danger, at the rear end of the infernal machine. Ram Jam, apprehensive of the outcome, definitely refused the job ; so that the 'mug,' thus called upon and still buoyed up with faith and optimism, had no other option. The stage was now set. All that was requisite was for some unsuspecting, luckless animal to walk in front of the sleeping volcano, the spark to be applied and the two desperadoes to return in triumph. A miss was totally out of the question. At the range at which this gun crew worked, such a thing was impossible.

The jungle pool drops slow to silence, whilst the immobile two patiently wait and wait.

A darker shape detaches itself from the shadow depths around and a full-grown 'blue-bull' walks down to the pool and stands to drink. The 'mug' clenches his teeth and hangs on like grim death to Mount Etna, whilst Ram Jam with outstretched arm touches it off. With the noise of a young cannon and the shattering effect of a Mills bomb, in a halo of smoke and flame, the complete outfit goes up. Coughing and splutter-

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

ing from the reeking pungent fumes of saltpetre, Ram Jam peers through the haze of smoke. Its dissipation shows him the scene of carnage. Ahead, the 'blue-bull' lies as dead as a door-knocker, whilst behind lies the unconscious form of the 'babe.' As for the gas-pipe, it had scattered itself far and wide in a hundred pieces. It is amazing how Ram Jam escaped being shrapnelled, presuming, of course, he was as near the explosion as he made out to be. Fearsomely he knelt over his comrade and found, to his stark astonishment, that he had a broken jaw and a dislocated shoulder. He regarded the unconsciousness as a minor affair, a mere necessary corollary to messing about with home-made gas-pipe guns, but this broken-bone business puzzled him. Further, the flying off into space of the weapon itself was inexplicable. Gas-pipe guns, as one very well knew, often burst, but this disintegration was a bit too much. Wonderingly he crossed over to the dead 'deer.' A gaping hole in the shoulder, as large as a dinner-plate, showed where the mass of metal had struck the luckless 'blue-bull.' Still puzzled, he prodded about in the hole, until suddenly his face broke into lines of enlightenment. In the wound he found the empty brass .405 cartridge case and the problem was solved. When the gas-pipe was discharged a piece of scrap iron had caught the cap of the high-explosive cartridge and caused it to go off inside the barrel, blowing the whole contraption to smithereens and at the same time knocking the 'mug' into oblivion accompanied by a broken jaw and a dislocated shoulder.

Ram Jam positively beamed as he ended his tale, told in an English lurid and blasphemous.

I was not disappointed. He finished on the expected note : "Got any cartridges, Sahib?"



THE WHEELS OF IND

The jungle in the daytime. Everything lies gasping in the stark heat which beats unmercifully down, blasting shrub and tree, withering the undergrowth. Rolling waves of shimmering haze perplex the eye and defy alignment. Heat, sweat and flies. Flies, heat and sweat. The leaves hang listless and jaded. The flowers of the 'flame' tree vividly flaunt their gorgeous scarlet. Everything is hot and oppressive. Tempers get frayed. The perspiration rolls from every pore. Any attempt to stop and rest is the occasion for clouds of flies, who alone seem to revel in the heat, to cover hands, knees and face with aggravating persistency. The minute eye-fly continually seeks to commit suicide by creeping, crawling or flying into the eyes of the luckless jungle-wanderer and eventually succeeds in its object to the accompaniment of intense pain in the eyes of its self-imposed tomb. The cicada whirls its irritant incessant monotone. The 'brain-fever' bird lashes himself into a maddened crescendo of saw-like notes, till the distracted ears are wearied and the disappearance of this miserable bird from ornithological ken most devotedly and sincerely wished for, usually in language more forcible than polite.

Bagh, the tiger, *bagheera*, the panther, his first cousin, *baloo*, the black bear, the Punch and Judy of the wild lands, and all the other denizens of the 'middle and lower jungle' are asleep. Hidden away in some less warm retreat, they await the first footfalls of night.

Far up in the cloudless sea of heat and blue, a solitary hawk hangs motionless as if flung by some giant hand and transfixed upon the battlements of the morning, whilst in the nearer distance a group of bald-headed vultures swing lazily through the sky, ghastly guests to the pickings left from the pre-dawn slaughter. The deer, timid and retiring, the prey of many, en-

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

deavour to snatch a few moments of watchful snooze before the same footfalls of night herald in another period of anxiety and wakefulness.

The brazen day drags to a close. Slowly the heated bowl inverted over us cools to a lesser heat, long shadows grow for a brief space and then swiftly fade, as if their Creator had blazed up like the flame of a dying candle for a last magnificent effort and consumed himself in the attempt. For a few brief minutes the Western sky proclaims the glory of the departing majesty. The hills and far-off masses of greenery lie splashed with lambent yellows, browns and golds. Roused to swift action, the Great Pageant Master rings down the curtain and, swathed in that formless light 'twixt day and night, the stage is set for the Queen of Heaven. Like a pale, globular, lemon carp she lazily swims higher and higher in the tank of the blue-black dark. Bats large and small twitter and squeak in their drunken erratic flight. Beetles hum, booming past with eerie drone. The thousand voices of the jungle chorus, lately batted down by the tyrant of the noon-day, now rise transcendent and triumphant and the purple-velvet vault of heaven echoes to the opening chords of the nightly moonlight sonata. Firefly spot-lights flicker from every tree whilst through the humid warmth, hither and thither in bewildering maze, ply hundreds of twinkling jewels like ghostly galleons riding seas which wash the shores of Fairyland.

On the platform of the station at Khongsara waits the old *shikari*. Clad only in his loin-cloth, he receives us with dignified *salaams*. He is to see us through the perils, real or imaginary, of the night. Outside the station, keeping warm over a few glowing embers, are half a dozen of his compatriots, children of the soil, with eyes, ears and nose attuned to Nature, full of

THE WHEELS OF IND

jungle craft and lore, pitting their skill and prowess against the cunning of the wild and yet withal happy, contented and care-free.

We muster the party and with the old man leading, his axe over one shoulder, his bow by his side, swing off down the path, through the sleeping village, whose dogs growl at the stranger but slink away at the angry command of old Nimrod.

The night air is redolent and heavy with the exquisite scent of India's peerless perfume, exhaled by the 'Queen of the Night,' a small plant with a white flower which grows almost like a weed in this charming locality. On either side of the road lie fields of *paddy* or of sugarcane and in their little *machans*, rudely-constructed shelters of bamboo perched precariously on four poles, the lonely watchers of the crops keep their night-long vigil. With beat of drums, rattle of sticks and gleam of signal fires, they scare away those midnight marauders, the wild pig, who make off with vexed grunt, to return, however, as soon as the fright has worn off.

And so to the threshold of the wild.

Its portals are bleached with the silver flood that flows from the moon riding high in the sky. Within the dark deeps of primeval forest, sinister and sombre, there is impenetrable darkness, or so it seems. The human eye, removed from artificial light, will soon accustom itself to the blackness and slowly focus its limited vision so as to perceive the dim shapes of things around. Not so, however, with those whose home lies in the dense forest aisles and retreats. They have never lost the power which once we had.

The night has a thousand eyes and now, 'in the noon-tide of the moon', the jungle, awake and alert, is alive with movement. Amid the shrubs, the clumps of bamboo and undergrowth, pressing aside the coarse

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

grass or slinking with stealthy footfall along the sandy *nullahs*, or dried-up stream-beds, thundering with the fear of death relentless and remorseless behind, with ears thrown back and eyes astart with fright, the hunters and the hunted are abroad.

There is no need to be unduly alarmed, however. It is almost certain that if we should accidentally, it would never be purposely, meet with a rightful occupier of this vast domain it would be ten times more startled and frightened than we and a thousand times quicker in putting as much distance between us as possible. Snakes, of course, deaf and sluggish, carelessly leave themselves lying about waiting to be stepped on, and each step is repaid by a bite.

Slowly and silently we go. No word must be loudly spoken, no light be struck. In the daytime the wild is alarmed most by movement; at night, scent and hearing are more to be relied upon than sight. As we make our way along the jungle-paths we see on the lower branches of a tree the dark shapes of peacock, roosting for the night, like the pheasant at Home. The air is full of sound. From the rocky heights to the right, a lordly *sambhur* stag, the prince of Indian deer, bells to the night and far away the answering challenge echoes through the trees. A 'barking deer' whistles in his peculiar way, whilst always the ear attuned to the wild hears the rise and fall of the jackal chorus as they roam the plains outside. Hark! What is that? From the gloom around comes an ominous cough and then a whiff of the odour which is ever with him. The deep notes are mere fragments of his challenge, just a sort of throat-clearance, for he invariably hunts silent.

So he too is abroad, probably unaware of our proximity, for the slight breeze blows from him. We hear

THE WHEELS OF IND

but do not see. His name must not be uttered in the jungle. These grown-up children of the forest who are with us to-night mutter in undertones : " He is there," 'It,' 'The Lord.' They say that he who dares call the name of *bagh*, the tiger, on his native heath, will next be called upon to answer for such insolence with his life. This is no idle saying to frighten naughty children at night. Too well these dwellers of the wild know the sickening smack of that terrible paw and the crushed-in neck of the slain. Does the fisherman talk slightly of the perils of the deep ?

Overhead the *bandar-log*, the monkey-folk, stir restlessly in their leafy beds. They, too, have felt the presence of the mighty one, the death that walks in silence. All around, once more the jungle drops to noise-filled silence, like a streamlet pool after the stone-created ripples have ebbed away. The air is full of the mystery and the fear of the unknown. Our livelier imaginations people the gloom around with sinister dangers ; we dwell upon the might-have-been, if, for example, our paths had crossed with His. Perfectly foolish, of course, but equally perfectly natural.

We startle a dark mass, asnooze under the deep dark of a tree, and away into the farther gloom plunges a lonely *sambhur* stag.

Steadily plodding along, our guide ahead tireless and unemotional, we finally reach our objective, a salt-lick hidden away in the heart of the wild.

An essential of the jungle-folk is salt. At various spots, not so common as might be imagined, occur outcrops of salt-impregnated earth. The ground displays no indication of this phenomenon. It looks like ordinary, common or garden soil. Rub one finger on the surface, however, and taste. Unmistakably saline ! All round this precious spot are the foot- and knee-

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

prints of the seekers, a perfectly open book of detail, regarding species, sex, age and size to our jungle companions, but to us, earth-blind, mere muddy impressions and nothing more.

We dispose ourselves around the 'lick,' behind bushes or rocks, with the moon shining behind us and compose ourselves for our vigil till dawn. We must not move, for, drenched with the molten silver which spills from the placid pool which hangs above us, all movement is intensified and this is fatal to our object. The foresights of our rifles are picked out with a spot of phosphorescent paint or marked with a speck of cotton-wool glued into position. These weapons, of course, are only for defence. To kill an animal over a salt-lick or across water, unless it be one of the larger carnivora, is a perfectly mean action. The beasts must drink and feed.

It is in this time of enforced immobility that we truly realize that the jungle is never still. Mosquitoes don't want salt! They want blood! When heaven delivers into their clutches idiotic persons who are content to sit and be eaten, why, they make the most of a good thing and call in all their friends and relations for miles around and thoroughly enjoy themselves.

Even the natives, with hides like rubber, further protected by the dirt of years, feel the pincer-like grip of these little fiends. Smoking, of course, is denied us.

If conditions, however, are favourable, and we manage to hold ourselves in check, we shall be introduced to the wonder of the wild in a way that is hardly possible elsewhere.

To enumerate the animals that come to take of the salt would be merely to catalogue. The hunted with hesitant, fearful steps, apprehensive of danger, stop and start at every murmur of the night wind in the trees,

THE WHEELS OF IND

ever watchful and ready to flee. Some approach near when apparently their courage fails and they break away back into the gloom. The hunters, equally watchful, but with an air of bravado, are less hesitant, but equally apprehensive, for the law of the strong is circular, and he who hunts to-day, to-morrow may be hunted.

And so, with intervals of silence pregnant of new mysteries, the procession moves, backward and forward. No animal stops longer than a minute or so, and as they taste and go, their places are taken by other types, and so it goes on till dawn.

Suddenly the silence is broken. Away in the depths of the forest are heard sounds which seem to herald the approach of some animal of monstrous size. The bushes and shrubs can be heard being violently shaken and our thoughts conjure up visions of the noble *hathi*, or elephant, trampling everything before him in his irresistible forward march. We well know, however, that the lordly elephant, together with the even shyer bison, has retreated before the advance of Western progress and is now safely hidden away in the fastnesses of the far hills.

The noise increases ; and now, in addition to the sound of breaking branches, we hear the voice of the intruder, coughing and spitting and apparently working himself up into a rage. The edge of the jungle divides and he shambles into our view. Who is this that reverses all the laws of the jungle, who creates noise when silence is golden, who lets all the world know he is abroad ? Why *baloo*, the bear, the humorist of the wild ! He cares for nobody, no, not he ! Half-blind and three-parts deaf, he forces his way through the thickest undergrowth and unceremoniously in his surly short-tempered manner disputes the right of way with every-

JUNGLE JAUNTS IN TIGER HAUNTS

thing he meets, and usually wins the argument. Even the tiger hesitates, unless forced, to challenge that huge mass of thick hide, thick fur and thicker head. He makes for the salt-lick but pauses in his walk and lifting his head snuffs at the wind which has veered round from its former quarter. The keenest scent in the jungle has discovered our hiding-place, and grunting his disapproval at the presence of his inveterate foes he turns tail and rushes back into the forest. The noise of his retreat recedes with diminishing effect until we hear him no more.

This uproar, however, seems to have disturbed things. Nothing more of any moment is seen. Reluctant yet gratified we come from behind the rocks and trees into the open to stamp our feet and relax our bodies, for the pre-dawn air is cold and we have sat cramped for a long time. We light our pipes or cigarettes, the natives produce their crude smoking-implements and soon a cloud of mosquito-dissipating smoke envelops us. We discuss with the *shikari* things seen and felt during the night and talk of our prospects for the shooting after dawn, probably the finest time of all to see game on the move.

As we move through the growing dawn-light to 'fresh woods and pastures new,' the jungle fills with the noise of dawning : the shrill screech of parrots, the whistle of pigeon and the cooing of doves. Monkeys chatter overhead, a *chital*, or spotted stag calls from the grasslands outside and a jungle-cock with his shrill clarion awakes the echoing morn. The breaking jackal packs howl to the sun, which pops over the eastern hills with a rapidity which has to be seen to be appreciated, and lo, once more it is day !

CHAPTER V

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

THE tiger, the largest cat in Asia, if not the whole world, is found in most parts of India. Recent reports would indicate that it is for the moment managing to hold its own as regards numbers, despite the hands, both brown and white, that are continually raised against it, even allowing for a yearly toll similar to the one of 1,368 destroyed in 1927. This is so far satisfactory as there is no doubt these predaceous beasts perform a useful service in the economy of Nature.

There is also no doubt, however, that since those days when Nimrod drew his bow in the virgin jungle and Samson slew his lion in the Vineyards of Timnath, the days of the big cats have been numbered. Every man's hand has been against them and each year sees a process of industrial and social evolution which must eventually mean their extinction as free-roving carnivora.

In India the projection of railways and roads and the opening-up of agricultural and industrial areas have driven the jungle-folk more and more into those solitudes which are essential to their existence. These fastnesses are slowly constricting and the time must surely if slowly come when the swan *Miau* of the bigger felines will be heard—to sound no more.

It is almost impossible to present a word-picture of typical tiger country. 'Stripes,' as he is more familiarly called in India, is found in the sweltering swamps of the Sunderbands at the mouth of the Hoogli, in the wooded

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

jungles and open plains of Central India, on the sea-girt Andamans and East Indies, on the tea-clad slopes of the Nilghiris and the rolling foothills of the Himalayas. Typical tiger country seems simply to be country where tiger are found. Provided there is the essential of food in the shape of well-fed deer, or slow-ambuling native cattle, 'Stripes' is happily domiciled.

Although preserved in several of the Native States, in British India the tiger is declared vermin. He may be shot at all times and destroyed by all ways and a reward of £2 is paid by a grateful Government to the slayer of the pest. In 1927, 36,034 rupees were thus disbursed for tigers slain.

Ten feet is no unusual length for a tiger, the female being somewhat smaller than the male with a lighter and narrower head.

It must be remembered that the tiger is the most powerful member of the cat family and that the length of the largest Bengal tiger, commonly referred to as the 'Royal' tiger, may exceed that of a lion. As a matter of fact 'Stripes' has so severely trounced his cousin 'Leo' that the lion is now only found in diminished numbers in one spot in India, the Gir forest of Kathiawar, where it is carefully watched and preserved by the Nawab of Junagarh.

The tiger is a killer, not predominantly a fighter; a slayer, not a murderer. He is a recluse, living alone, hunting alone, and when his time comes, dying alone. He is a dweller in the shade, and dislikes the sun. His instinctive shyness and dread of man often make his presence unsuspected. With these traits he differs from the gregarious lion with his love of sun-bathing and the leopard whose contempt for man and his handiwork is almost proverbial.

It is not common to find tiger together. At mating-

THE WHEELS OF IND

time a pair may be found, but the male soon deserts his mate to resume his solitary existence. The tigress brings forth her cubs alone in some desolate, isolated spot and there the cubs, who may number from two to six, though seldom more than three, are reared. They remain with her till nearly full grown, a matter of nearly two years. Then the circle starts again. The mother contracts another alliance or maybe takes up again with her former lord. In any case the returned father or new-found stepfather, in the strength of his years and experience, usually administers a sound thrashing to the lads of the family, afterwards thrusting them out into a hard world to fend for themselves. The maidens, of course, take after their mother and start housekeeping on their own.

It is usually found that a tiger tyrannically holds a piece of wild land and is prepared to defend his title thereto against all comers—with certain exceptions.

He lords this jungle by his might and for his strength men fear him, but he will not fight unless forced. From time immemorial the motto of his House has been, 'Discretion is the better part of valour.'

He is stealthy, as perforce he must be. His dinner depends upon an unseen stalk through grass and scrub, a lightning, unsuspected leap and the mighty sweep of a terrible paw which smashes in the skull like an egg. Or perhaps as he springs on some hapless deer, marked down from afar, his huge paw is flung over his victim's farther shoulder, the throat gripped in two powerful jaws and the leap continued across the deer's back to the other side. The head is thus violently wrenched round, and the neck broken. With a choking, burbling groan the stag sinks to the ground and once again Nature is served.

So alone through the jungle he goes, as silent as the



By courtesy, The Bengal-Nagpur Railway Co., Ltd

TYPICAL JUNGLE COUNTRY IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

'sighs of silence,' his soft feet padding along : nearly five hundred pounds of magnificently moulded muscle and brawn and not a sign of his passing, except one. If he happens to be near and the breeze blows from the brute, the faint whiff which always accompanies the tiger and which is usually associated with caged animals comes to the nostrils.

He is not so crafty as the leopard and his objective is usually approached in a straightforward manner. A sight of his quarry, a straight stalk, an orange-striped mass hurtling through the air on to its doomed prey, a slap of a paw—and the disposal of the body.

His dread of man is age-long. 'Stripes' is easily frightened and will more often than not give way rather than dispute the passage. Accidental meetings between man and tiger generally result in the brute turning aside and slinking away. If disturbed at a kill he may naturally show resentment but hardly ever is he the aggressor.

A friend with whom I have had many days of jungle-wandering, once ran up the dried-up bed of a stream, chasing peafowl. Rounding a corner he ran slap into a tiger, just about to drink at a stagnant pool. Both were badly frightened. The tiger showed his teeth, but slunk away and lost his drink. My friend went back round the corner and lost his dinner.

It would be a libel, however, to brand 'Stripes' a coward. When occasion demands, he puts up a magnificent fight, but God made him as he is and he prefers to be left alone. If a tiger be met in the jungle, unexpectedly and unwelcome, a clapping of the hands or a similar small noise is usually sufficient to send him frightened away. He never seeks a fight. He realized long before the advent of a League of Nations that fighting is a poor game and its reward, more often than not,

THE WHEELS OF IND

mythical. His only object is to get his dinner, but unfortunately this innocent purpose frequently cuts across the path of man. No compromise seems possible, with the result that poor old 'Stripes' is variously portrayed as a four-legged fury breathing death and destruction o'er all the land, or as a weak-kneed, spineless quadruped who lifts silly native cattle and knocks over foolish village women with impunity but clears off on the arrival of real men demanding redress. Neither of these pictures is correct.

During the day, when the blazing sun of an Indian noon burns up the scorching jungles, the tiger lies up in some cool retreat, asleep, secure in his power. The first footfalls of evening, however, find him getting ready for the night's work. All around him the deer, *sambhur*, *chital*, *nilghai*, *barasingha*, and many others are moving to their feeding-grounds. All the jungle-folk are abroad on their rightful nightful occupations. The brute world is alive and moving. The sounds of the wild are all around—the belling of the *sambhur*, the whistle of the 'barking deer,' and the hideous cacophony of the hyena, whilst on the plain at the jungle edge the gathering jackal packs howl to the rising moon. Life is here, abundant and pulsating, but death too is in its midst, silent to be sure, but all the more terrible and mysterious for that.

The tiger hunts silent. A mouse-eating cat with bells on would often go hungry. He usually kills every two or three days and may, if really peckish, eat on the spot, beginning at the head of the kill, as distinct from the panther which commences at the hind-quarters. Or he may drag the body to some convenient sheltered spot and leave it there to be called for. Upon his return he will usually approach the body in a direction opposite to the one in which he had previously dragged it. This

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

is an important point to bear in mind when arranging to sit over a dead body to await the tiger's return. After he has eaten he usually makes for the nearest water to drink and then lies up. This is another important point to keep in mind. If the nearest water to the freshly eaten kill be found and the vicinity beaten round, there is every prospect of finding a full-fed, sleepy-eyed, disgruntled tiger, not waiting to scatter death and defiance all around but only wishful to slink away to finish his interrupted nap. As with most killing carnivora the tiger is usually improvident with his kills. He takes a meal or a mouthful, as his appetite and mood dictate, and with no thought of the morrow leaves practically all the flesh for the sweepers-up, jackal, hyena, peafowl, vulture and ants.

In the wooded wastes the tiger lords it over all his compatriots, with, however, *hathi*, the elephant, the 'red *dhole*,' or wild dog, of India and more particularly man, at all times excepted. Old Man Boar too requires very careful handling and is best tackled when asleep ; whilst only a poor fool of a youngster would consider an argument with a buffalo.

It is the straying away from his rightful domain that makes the tiger the Ishmael he so often becomes. A falling-off in the birth-rate of the deer tribe ; the influx of unwelcome but insistent tigers into an area unable adequately to support the immigrants ; the advance of old age with its accompanying senile decay, stiffening muscles, and diminished power ; the loss of teeth or, more especially to young and virile tigers, the permanent or semi-permanent injuries received from would-be tiger-slayers ; these all tend to bar the animal from his natural food. The injuries of battle or lacerations in paws received from porcupine quills, for example, equally tend to the production of the unnatural killer.

THE WHEELS OF IND

In hunger and desperation he turns his weary eyes towards the tended beasts that labour for the needs of man. He finds the village cattle easy plunder. In wait he watches for the straggler, crouching behind some bush or hidden, dappled by the lengthening evening shadows, in the long dry grass. It is indeed a slaughter of the innocents. He finds this method of procuring food so absurdly easy that he gradually sheds his instinctive timidity of man and boldly seeks his victim. In broad daylight, despite the alarm cries of the watchful herdsmen, he drags down some hapless cow and throwing it partly across his broad shoulders, clears away. The end is very clear. Sooner or later he finds his attempts to get cattle foiled by vigilant watchers rendered doubly fearful by the continued slaughter of their sole means of support. Enraged at this puny resistance his paw falls again, this time on a human victim, and he has crossed the Rubicon. He is now a thing accursed, a slayer of men, with a price upon his head, growing in size as his offences increase. In 1927, the most recent period for which official figures are available, 1,033 persons were killed in British India alone by tiger, although this figure appears small when compared with the 19,069 unfortunate folk who came to an untimely end from snake-bite.

The putting-down of these man-killing and man-eating brutes, who by their own misdeeds have made themselves pariahs, is usually more dangerous than the organized shooting of virile, law-abiding beasts, who run more true to type than their fellows. These former have cast aside their instinctive dread of man, and the vigilance which their killing engenders in their human prey and the consequent scarcity of food which this implies make the tiger most resolute and cunning in

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

the satisfying of his hunger. He will boldly enter the haunts of man and mark down his victim, make his kill and clear back to his jungle home.

It was at a place called Karkeli that I first saw a human 'kill.' The village *moochi*, or cobbler, had been struck down within a stone's throw of his dwelling at the end of the straggling village. The tiger had been disturbed. It was still daylight, though night was near, and although no sound had been made either by slayer or slain, the brute had been seen. Too late to prevent the death, the villagers had frightened 'Stripes' away with loud noise; and now the loathsome brute, though not foiled in his dread purpose, had lost his meal and would prowl in the near-by jungle until further opportunity, perhaps in the shape of some unsuspecting luckless villager going out in the chilly dawn the next day to his fields, should provide him with that for which he sought. The fact that another white man and myself happened to be practically on the spot when the foul deed occurred doubtless accounted for our being informed of the tragedy. Usually the unsophisticated jungle-dweller shrinks from the publicity occasioned by informing the white man, even though he realizes that therein lies his best means of salvation. He holds that he who tells will be the next victim and thus fettered by his own superstition he holds back till it is too late for vigorous measures to be taken.

There lay the body, under a sacred *pipal* tree, face downward to the soil. One crude village-made shoe still hung on drunkenly to one of the widespread feet, whilst its fellow shoe had been shot many yards away. One hand still clutched a brass *lotah*, or pot, from which the water slowly trickled away to mingle with the pious libations poured on these sacred roots some few short moments past. His thin cotton *dhoti* and vest fluttered

THE WHEELS OF IND

in the slight breeze which stirred the leaves above him. The silence of twilight lay about us. The lengthening shadows crept around, as still as he who lay, as quiet as the beast that had gone. His friends and companions in toil and play stood around, each thinking perhaps in some confused way that it might have been himself who sprawled upon the earth so ominously still. The two whites stood amongst them. To one the sight was no novelty. The other, fresh to all this stark tragedy of the wild, felt rather tremulous inside and wished things had been otherwise. The atmosphere was heavy and awesome. The victim looked as if he had flung himself upon the ground in an excess of exhaustion and we who stood around seemed but to await his awakening. No casual sign told of violent death, no mark or stain repelled the cursory glance. But as we stooped we saw that his head from the nape of his neck to the crown was beaten to pulp like a sponge. Once only had that terrible paw fallen and he had died in his tracks as he fell.

Only a few hundred yards away was the beast that had done it. It would not entirely leave its kill till satisfied that further wait was futile. Hungry and angry at being deprived of his prey, baulked but desperate, it would hang around, too scared to come out into the open, yet reluctant to retreat. It might be asked why did not my colleague and myself, armed, as we always were, with modern high-power rifles, metaphorically 'pull up our socks,' enter the jungle and once for all end the career of the man-eater.

The main reason was that we were not brave enough, or foolhardy enough, to attempt an almost forlorn hope. It would have been madness, if not suicide, to enter that green belt, alone and unprepared, to face an enraged and hungry tiger, probably crouching behind a

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

shrub of an almost incredible smallness to ^{the} screen a beast so large. Years of jungle training and an iron nerve are required to meet, on foot, a tiger that is prepared to stalk the hunter with all the cunning and stealth of the huntsman combined with the ferocity and strength of the brute. Of material like this are the world's famous big-game shots made. It has been stated that the number of the world's first class big-game hunters never reaches double figures, so it will be readily perceived that the qualifications are very rare.

We did, however, offer to sit up during the night over the body to await the expected return of the tiger. The bereaved relatives, however, would have none of this. They only wished to take the remains away for decent burial and as their desire was perfectly natural there was no alternative but to leave them with their dead.

In any case this was Rewa State, the land of 1,000-rupee tigers.

Weeks afterwards, when this same tiger had terrorized the district and thoroughly demoralized the village folk, I saw about a dozen local Robin Hoods arrive, armed with bows and arrows. I inquired the cause of their presence. They had been sent to put out the 'Karkeli Killer.' Picturesque, very, but as tiger exterminators, pitiable.

In most parts of game-haunted British India each village boasts its local *shikari* who is allowed by Government to carry arms, usually a weapon of the gas-pipe variety, often infinitely more dangerous to him who shoots than to it which is shot at. For the sake of the reward offered for the death of each tiger, and also to justify his existence as the village defender in the eyes of his fellows, the *shikari* periodically goes off into the jungle, armed with his trusty gas-pipe. There he waits over some forest path, salt-lick or drinking-pool and

THE WHEELS OF IND

when 'Stripes' issues forth he discharges this fearsome weapon with its load of old nails, rusty scrap and other oddments of that calibre into the luckless beast at a range of a few feet. Many things may happen.

In the first place the animal may fall dead from a luckily placed shot, in which case there is a tiger less and a *shikari* still alive ; or again, badly wounded, the tiger may crawl away to perish miserably of its wounds, the persistent tracker dogging its footsteps to the end. Or yet again, it may get clear away with non-fatal but disabling wounds and more often than not, in such a case, will turn man-eater for the reasons previously set out. *Failing a direct hit a sheer miss is the desideratum*, but this latter is very rare as the tiger is shot at broadside on at a range of a few feet.

In some Native States, as in Rewa, tigers are strictly 'taboo,' and many curious things happen to the rude proletariat who presume to lift a finger against them. To judge from the insolence and haughty contempt of man evinced by tigers in these areas it would almost appear they are fully cognizant of their exalted rank and untouchability. This protection of tigers from indiscriminate shooting has its good points. For one thing it limits the artificial manufacture of man-eaters, although the complete elimination of such is counter-acted by the influx of such brutes who have been harassed out of neighbouring territory where free licence is given to all and sundry. In Nepal, for example, where there are one hundred tigers to every gun, man-eaters are rare. In British India, on the contrary, where there are one hundred guns to every tiger, the direct opposite is the case.

The tiger is hunted in many ways, some primitive and crude, others more refined and incidentally more costly. It is possible to go into known tiger country

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

and roam around for weeks without seeing any sign of 'Stripes.' Or again, one may wander haphazardly through some jungle and meet him face to face. Twice have I known men go out from Bilaspur on one day and come back the next with a dead tiger. Yet on other occasions the same men have gone out fully prepared for a long trip and maybe for a month tramped many weary miles through likely country and spent hundreds of rupees with no tangible result.

The tiger has been so much studied and hunted that practically his complete life story and habits are thoroughly understood. Knowing what he may be expected to do under any particular set of circumstances, arrangements can be made accordingly. Of course there are times when he upsets one's calculations, but more often than not he runs true to type. The more sophisticated natives hunt him down with gas-pipe guns as already described ; whilst those Dravidian remnants of Central India, the Gonds, the Bhils, and the Santals plant a poisoned arrow into him from a range of a few feet and track him down for days, with a skill most uncanny, until the poison has done its work and the body is retrieved.

Again, the tiger can be waited for over the slain bodies of his victims, but the reluctance of the bereaved natives to inform white men of a human kill until it is too late has already been alluded to. One must be almost on the spot to be there in time to greet 'Stripes' on his return ; otherwise one finds on arrival that the body has been disturbed and the ground so trampled and the scent of man so flung around that in all probability, even if the tiger did return, he would be too suspicious to approach.

A cow can be tied up or a young horse, if procurable, to attract the tiger within range of the waiting guns,

THE WHEELS OF IND

but somehow 'Stripes' is usually very suspicious of man-made offerings and generally keeps away from them unless rendered desperate by hunger. Shooting over water, whilst permissible, is not usually indulged in by white men. It seems to be taking a very unfair advantage of the animal. After all, he must drink; and in the hot season, when the forest pools dry up one by one, he is almost compelled to go to some watched spot in order to quench his thirst. The jungle-people, of course, do not share the peculiar scruples of the white man nor do they work to so fine a code.

Such methods as these usually mean shooting at night by moonlight with a piece of cotton-wool fastened to the foresight of the rifle, or a dab of phosphorescent paint stuck thereon. If one desires to be very up to date, there are many makes of electric flash-lamps designed to clip to the rifle.

In any case aiming is very uncertain; shadows look like tigers and tigers like shadows. The beast can come and go on velvet feet without the watcher being any the wiser.

Sleep presses upon the eyelids, although for a small emolument a bronzed son of the forest will sit by the sahib to keep him awake, or if he dozes, to inform him when he sees or hears anything suspicious. One is usually accompanied by a native hunter whose eyes and ears and nose are more attuned to Nature's warnings than those of the white man who has been shut out from his natural heritage by what, for want of a better term, we call civilization.

The nobility of India, the Rajahs and their guests, hunt the tiger from the backs of trained elephants.

Lines of these huge beasts, carrying on their backs *howdahs* containing the armed sportsmen, beat through likely cover towards other lines coming in to meet them.

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

The ends join and the circle constricts in size until the frightened and harassed tiger is eventually forced into the open. To be seen is to be shot at and in few cases, fortunately for the humble villagers who will have to remain on the spot after the cavalcade has departed, does the tiger get away.

Certain ones, of course, break back through the line of beating elephants and are so lost, but those who remain have little chance to defend themselves or put up any sort of a fight.

Accidents, of course, do happen, just as they occur on the hunting-fields of England. In certain cases, for months prior to a big shoot of this kind, the tigers in a certain selected piece of jungle are virtually hand fed. Dozens of native cattle are put into the jungle regularly for the delectation of 'Stripes' so as to induce him not to roam too far afield. This heaven-sent bounty continues until the tigers are so full-fed, fat and lazy that they have no desire to run away when their time comes, but stop at home to receive the visitors—and be shot at.

The most common method of shooting tiger, however, is by beating him towards *machans*, on which are placed the guns.

A *machan* is a rude platform constructed by the natives on the spot in the branches of a tree, from living jungle material, and artfully concealed by branches and leaves.

These *machans* are usually placed, if possible, about 20 to 25 ft. above the ground, as a tiger can usually spring about 15 ft. from the ground, even when badly wounded, and on occasions higher still. Fortunately, unlike the panther and leopard, it cannot climb trees, although on rare occasions tigers have been known to ascend them. Contrary to popular opinion, the tiger is also a good swimmer and takes readily to water.

THE WHEELS OF IND

The shoot may take place in Government Reserve jungles, or again in jungle which is not Native State or Government preserved. For the average sportsman the most likely spots are in the Government forests and permission to shoot, which is rarely refused to a suitable applicant, is obtained from the Divisional Forest Officer of the district concerned. A permit is issued on payment at a rate of 20 rupees *per mensem* (30s. per month) which is just the pay of the forest guard who will accompany the party.

Presuming our permits are in order and the local forest officials notified, we set off for the spot. Arriving there, we call for the head *shikari* of the Government Forest block and inform him of our plans, and discuss with him the likely prospects. He knows almost to a tiger how many animals are in that particular area. Daily he has watched the ground, and in view of our imminent arrival trackers have been sent out to bring in *khabber*, or news, of our quarry. We commission the *shikari* to gather together the *harka-wallahs*, or beaters, who will be paid two annas or twopence per day for maybe twelve-hours' gruelling work. This seems small but appears to be the *harka-wallah's* union scale. Once, in a misguided fit of generosity, I paid a few dozen *harka-wallahs* threepence *per diem* and was afterwards thoroughly rebuked by my compatriots for attempting to inflate the local money market.

Now there may be tigers in the jungles we are going to enter, whilst the local *shikari* has been most indefatigable in ministering to our wishes. Do not, however, get the mistaken idea that he is doing this because he loves us or that any of his tigers are going to be ours for nothing. You pay for all you get in this world and India is no exception. It is customary to give the *shikari* a small emolument for a sight of a tiger and a larger one, to-

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

gether with the Government reward, if a kill is made. It is impossible to obtain the more coveted types of animal unless the requisite *baksheesh* or palm oil is given to this Director of Ceremonies.

If this precaution be neglected he gives a quiet word to the beaters and they drive all the game away from and not towards us, whilst by our side on the *machan* rests his lordship uttering maledictions on non-appearing tigers and most profuse and abject in his expression of sympathy for the sahib's bad luck. All the time, of course, the wily rascal knows the game is moving in the wrong direction, to be conserved and brought out on some more auspicious occasion, for other sahibs better able to recognize the more delicate aspects of financial diplomacy. Even so, tigers cannot be produced on demand, and much time, trouble and money must be expended before the elusive animal is driven into view. And then you may miss him or he may give no chance for a shot and so escape.

We will presume, however, we have adequately remunerated the head-man for benefits to come and have gathered together the requisite number of *harka-wallahs* and that as the sun is leaving us once more, the watchful scouts bring in *khabber* of tiger either having killed or inhabiting temporarily a certain portion of jungle. Arrangements are again talked over with the *shikari*, necessary preparations are made, guns cleaned and oiled, and after a meal we retire to snatch a few hours' sleep. About 3 or 4 a.m., we are aroused and in the chilly air of early dawn we dress and partake of a hurried breakfast. Before our rising, certain jungle natives have been detailed off to erect the *machans* at well-known spots where the tiger, if driven, would be likely to break cover. For example, the tiger is remarkably tender-footed, and will, if at all possible, refrain from traversing rough or debris-covered ground. He prefers to travel

THE WHEELS OF IND

down the *nullahs*, or dried-up sandy beds of the forest streams. Thus provided by Nature with a carpet for his wanderings he pads along, soft underfoot, with little risk of sharp thorns disabling him. Consequently there is every possibility of him coming down a convenient *nullah* and a *machan* is erected accordingly to command that exit.

Off we go into the jungle towards these bottle-necked game-tracks whilst the *harka-wallahs* make a detour of a mile or so. These men are true children of the forest, happy, light-hearted and contented. Clad only, in many cases, in a loin-cloth, they are going to march through scrub and grass, timber and open, under a blazing sun, all for the aforesaid 'tuppence' *per diem*. They are armed with bamboo staves useful for producing a resonant noise when struck against standing trees. An occasional axe is seen and maybe one or two bow-and-arrow outfits.

In addition to the foregoing, numerous empty kerosene oil tins, skin-covered earthenware *chatties*, or water-pots, and tom-toms are freely scattered amongst them to produce the miniature bedlam of sound requisite to scare the poor old tiger to slaughter. It is by such orthodox methods that 'Stripes,' the lord of this domain, is to be harassed to destruction. It might be imagined that these fellows run grave risks in marching through thick undergrowth and dense jungle. True, there is the usual danger attendant on promiscuous trampling, snakes and the like, but otherwise, normally, they are quite safe. On occasions, the tiger, too scared to move forward, breaks back through the cordon of beaters drawing round him, but invariably he is too frightened to be dangerous. He just blunders through blindly. I remember an instance when the tiger, in his headlong terror, knocked over four beaters like ninepins and broke

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

away. For all I know to the contrary he is still running. These men were not hurt, only slightly bruised and suffering from shock. In such cases *baksheesh* is a specific cure.

Beating, however, must be performed by experienced men. They must maintain contact, work to some preconceived plan and not make too much noise or the tiger will be so scared that he will break past the guns with the speed of an express train. Similarly, too little noise or desultory beating will enable the tiger to lie low, cowering in the grass, and so be passed.

In addition to creating all the racket they can, by banging on passing trees and thumping on tom-toms and *chatties*, they shout and sing loudly. For two reasons: to boost up their own courage to boiling-point and lower that of poor old 'Stripes' to zero. When the tiger is sighted a changed note in the shouting informs the experienced ears waiting at the business-end of the beat that the quarry has been found and all eyes and ears are alert.

We arrive at the *machans* and place ourselves according to arranged order. These positions are so determined that there is little risk of one man shooting on his flanks to hit his neighbours. Similarly, promiscuous letting-off of guns at targets ahead is discountenanced. We must remember we are out to shoot tigers and not our companions on our right and left, nor the poor *harka-wallahs* coming through the jungle towards us. Even here it will be observed a small amount of self-control is necessary.

We climb up into the *machan* accompanied by a native, whose eyes and ears will considerably augment ours, and pull up our weapons after us. We settle down. Only the normal sounds of the undisturbed jungle are around us. No noise of beaters falls on

THE WHEELS OF IND

our ears ; they are too distant. Even so we must be prepared. 'Stripes' might anticipate the preparations made for him and come out unbidden.

Sound is to be avoided, but movement is fatal. Whilst the huge cats work with ears and eyes they depend upon the latter most. A noise, particularly from a tall tree, may occasion little or no uneasiness, but movement is almost certain to be noticed and the animal warned of the proximity of danger. So we must not move, uncomfortable and wearisome as it is. Sheltered from the direct blaze of the sun, we still feel the clammy stickiness of the shade.

An adventurous mosquito finds us out and sends back the glad news to the waiting battalions. Onwards they come to make life a misery, too plainly aware of our inability to drive or smoke them out.

A wandering red ant, pugnacious and aggressive, the Columbus of his tribe, makes the discovery of his little life : knees and arms that for some unaccountable reason wriggle not and sweat-soaked bodies that exist but to be loitered on. A communist in the broadest meaning of the term, he shares his prize with his fellows who roll up in their myriads to batten and not be batted.

And so it drags along.

Tiger shooting, it will be perceived, has its disadvantages.

We can see so far ahead into the jungle in front of us, but our view is broken by standing trees, clumps of bamboo, grass and scrub. The best time to shoot in the forest is in the height of the hot weather when the undergrowth is burnt out and the trees stand gaunt and bare. Then the view is better, but unfortunately the tiger is wearing his summer coat, which is not to be compared with the magnificent hide and bewhiskered head carried by him in the cooler season when the

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

jungles lie deep and verdant. In the monsoon or rainy season the wild lands are almost impassable and most miserable, and shooting in them almost out of the question.

We must be on the alert. Things are moving.

Kiki, the porcupine, comes out of a clearing and unconcernedly noses his way aimlessly through the bamboo brake. Following up come two young piglets, brown and black banded, the vanguard of a scattered litter ; and after a while the old sow arrives, looking for her wandering offspring. Next a jungle-cock, red-eyed and aggressive, comes strutting along. Woe betide if his keen eyes glimpse us ! He is the alarm clock of the wild. His cry spells danger and the wild folk know it. I once had a promising shoot completely spoiled, just as the game had been driven near, by one of these little fiends spotting me and immediately raising a wild alarm in his efforts to spread the news of his discovery. To my credit, let it be stated, I did not shoot this most unwelcome interloper. However, I got a useful one in with a stone.

And so the zoo moves forward, quietly and naturally, as if it were going of its own accord and not at the bidding of man. This is splendid tribute to the efficiency of our beaters. Fire a shot, however, and their patient work is undone. However tempting the other animals that present themselves, we must not shoot. The sound of a rifle would scare away that mass of striped hide which is slowly being pushed towards us.

Presently, in the near distance a shout goes up to the sky. Our native companion gently nudges us into extra watchfulness and we know the great moment is near. We clasp our rifle more firmly, glance along its sights and stare away into the green until it hurts and our eyes play tricks. At any moment he may appear. A

THE WHEELS OF IND

thousand thoughts fill our minds. We know that he who first hits the tiger, be the wound ever so superficial, is owner of the trophy when secured. Where, then, shall we aim, if fate be kind and the tiger come our way? The brain is but the size of an apple and affords a small target, in addition to which the head might be shattered and ruined beyond the skill of the taxidermist to repair. Then it must be the side shot, behind the fore-legs as he stands before us, a shot tearing through heart, lungs and liver ; or else one bullet smash through his shoulders to drop him and another through the vitals to kill. All this may sound very cruel and bloodthirsty, as no doubt it is, but we are here on a tiger-shoot, not a tea-party, and the job had better not have been started if it is to be bungled. In any case there must be no snap shooting or fancy shots. The sequence of events must be :

“ One man on a tree,
One tiger ahead,
One shot from a gun,
Result : Tiger dead.”

If not, there'll be trouble.

If there should happen to be two tigers, a male and a female, what then? Well, we have a start of 20 ft.—upwards, so let us take our choice and drop the best specimen first—for preference. Don't do this, however, if you meet a pair on foot.

If you shoot the tiger first, the female will immediately attack in defence of her mate. Shoot the tigress first, and the male, I regret to have to write it, invariably pushes off, no doubt a bereaved widower, but at any rate a live one.

A loud crashing now comes from the jungles ahead.
Heavy feet are heard smashing through the grass.

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

The uninitiated feels that this must be the tiger announcing his approach. Nothing but that or an elephant could make so much din.

And so we wait, tense with excitement, heart pumping like a steam-hammer and veins, temporarily devoid of warm blood, carrying iced water. The time for nervousness is not yet, however. Out come the gate-crashers! Reaching the edge of the clearing, their heavy bodies take the air and with slow lumbering flight they pass over our heads and away. Peacock, whose presence in jungles is looked upon as a good sign of tiger whose kills they follow after; for despite his fine plumage the peacock is a carrion-eater and with the vultures, hyenas, jackals and ants, clears the table after his lordship has dined. Albeit, he makes a magnificent dish and recollections of roast peafowl on jungle-trails are memories of the East which time does not seem to bedim.

The noise of the beaters draws nearer and nearer. We catch occasional glimpses, through long vistas of greenery, of brown men moving.

Still no sign of the tiger!

He is hugging the line of beaters as long as he can.

Harassed and weary, full-fed and lazy, drowsy from his interrupted nap, he doesn't want to come out and be shot at. The beaters now take to the trees, but maintain their clamour.

There is sometimes a flaw in the mechanism, and they don't wish to depart from this planet too suddenly. A live tiger going yon way is feasible, a dead one stopping there most desirable; but a wounded brute looking for someone on whom to vent his rage and coming this way is totally out of the question.

The atmosphere is tense with excitement. The stock

THE WHEELS OF IND

of the rifle close against our cheek, mosquitoes, ants, heat, thirst all forgotten, we wait through the eternity that precedes His advent.

Is that darkness under the trees deeper than shadow?

We watch and watch and watch.

Presently a tawny head, yellow-eyed and bewhiskered like some sun-tanned hoary mariner from the pages of Romance, peers through the leaves and gazes out upon the arena.

The noise of the beaters decides him and he steps out into the open and comes towards us.

One hundred yards, eighty, sixty, forty, and still he gives no chance. Shall we risk the head shot or wait till he goes past us on our flank? At thirty yards he stops and turns to look around him. His hind-quarters are partly hidden by a clump of bamboo, but his head and shoulders stand out boldly in the glare of the Indian sun. Slowly his tail begins to lash his sides. Is he getting suspicious? We will never have a better chance. It is now or never. Carefully we take aim, the sights at six o'clock just touching the body behind the shoulder, hold our breath and squeeze the trigger. Over he falls, roaring with pain, smashing and tearing at his wound. Again we shoot, and the massive head rolls forward, the great body with its panting sides falls over again, and soon there is no movement.

After an interval of some length, a native, more daring than his fellows, dashes down from his tree and rushing forward snatches at the tail. By his temerity in so doing he attains the Everest of his calling, tiger strength and cunning, and also exhibits his bravery to the sahibs, who will, no doubt, suitably remember him. Sometimes, however, these tail-snatchers, instead of attaining recognition, attain 'Nirvana,' which is an Indian spiritual paradise. Wounded tigers, and more especially

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

panthers, often 'play possum,' and in such circumstances resent most forcibly their tails being interfered with.

This tiger is dead, but on the other hand we might, for some reason, have hit the tiger but not stopped him, and he might then have broken back into the jungle.

Will he die? Maybe he will, in which case we are lucky; and again maybe he won't, in which case we are decidedly unfortunate. The affair in this event has now progressed from a mild flirtation with danger to a fully qualified membership of the Suicide Club. The command 'Thou shalt not kill' is to-day so universally accepted that no one questions it, but now a fresh precept, its very reverse, is given us: 'Thou shalt kill.' The tiger we have wounded and which has got away must be satisfactorily accounted for.

Many things *may* have happened. In the first place he may be mortally wounded and will lie up somewhere until he dies, in which case the native trackers will find the body. Or, again, his wounds may stiffen and congeal and so prevent that unsuspected spring which has carried death to dozens. Or maybe he is only slightly or superficially wounded, in which case he is no doubt still running, over the hills and far away, and a few days will see him fit and well again, resuming his lawful and rightful avocations.

On the other hand, perhaps he is away into the wild with a broken paw, smashed jaw or a crushed limb which, never healing, turns him into what he was never meant to be and should not be—a man-eater.

The responsibility now resting upon us is a great one. We may have created a future horror for these innocent folk around us, and the unwritten law of *shikar* must be obeyed.

One thing, however, is most important.

No one must leave the trees which afford them

THE WHEELS OF IND

protection. The wounded tiger may be two miles away, or he may be 2 ft. ; in the next district, or round the next corner.

Going to look is distinctly unhealthy. Jump to the ground, wander within the ambit of his unsuspected leap and the result may be fatal. We have transformed a fairly law-abiding animal into a bundle of muscled fury, out for death and destruction, tearing and rending with fetid fangs and claws which leave in their wake the germs of the deadly tetanus. In such circumstances, too, the tiger is sufficiently cunning to lie low behind cover of unbelievable smallness to await his victim. To see your tiger hit and get away is, of course, most annoying, and in the excitement of the moment one is tempted to fling advice and common sense to the winds and jump down to follow. Those who yield to this instinct never rise far in tiger shooting. Their usual rise is heavenward. The Roll of Honour of Indian *Shikar* is full of the names of these headstrong adventurous souls. How then do we overcome this seeming paradox—get the tiger, but stay up the tree? Some considerable time must be allowed to elapse before we quit the protecting trees and come down to the ground. (Again will be observed the discomforts of tiger shooting.)

Three things have now had time to happen. The tiger is dead ; his wounds have congealed and he is comparatively helpless ; or else he has got clear away with slight hurt. An examination of the bloodstained ground will afford a fair indication of the extent of his injuries and the likelihood of his being around. If in the vicinity he must be found. Poking into likely looking bushes and saying "Puss, puss", is again distinctly unhealthy. The natives naturally set a certain value on their own skins and don't particularly relish openly looking for trouble.

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

So we fall back on Nature and call in the buffalo. A small herd of native buffalo are procured from the nearest village on the understanding that if returned intact the owner will have his services rewarded in the usual manner. Any beasts destroyed by the tiger will be paid for at a price agreed before, and not after, the slaughter. Human nature being the same in the Orient as in the Occident it is perhaps unnecessary to add that at such times local fat-stock prices soar upwards.

Forward we go, driving the cattle before us, the native trackers picking up the trail as they go along, a blood-specked leaf there, a broken branch here, dragged *pug* marks on sandy patches and trodden grass where the stricken brute has rested. The buffaloes are inveterate foes of 'Stripes,' and the hatred is mutual. Their keen scent, however, of tiger and blood comes to our service, and after a long trek, maybe, the beasts crowd in together for mutual support and, lifting their huge heads, sniff the air. They move forward slowly and unwillingly, looking for the tiger, with horns and hoofs ready, whilst we follow up with rifles at the alert. A striped mass rushes out of its cover and springs for the nearest buffalo, who lowers its head to meet the onslaught. A quick shot, maybe two, and the unequal battle is over. The blood-maddened buffaloes are driven off and sent away home to gladden the heart of their owner, and we sit round the body of the slain.

To the jungle-folk every piece of the tiger is valuable. His whiskers, chopped fine and powdered, are a specific for every complaint. The fat rendered down and sold to the credulous herd at one rupee per ounce is a perfect panacea for all ills. The hide is a covering highly prized, whilst the claws and teeth are powerful charms. To a crowd who eat snakes, rats, lizards and such-like vermin with ardent relish, the carcass is a veritable

THE WHEELS OF IND

dainty. He who first touches the tiger claims for his bravery the fat, which is certainly the most lucrative of the pickings as it is so much coveted and so easily disposed of, at a price of course. In this case, however, the external decorations are not for them. A careful eye must be kept on the body in the excitement of the moment, or afterwards, when skinning operations are commenced, the animal you have shot appears to be minus a few whiskers, teeth and claws. Maybe the indications of a freak, but usually the mark of a sneak.

Under our proud eyes, the skin is removed from the body. It is a long and tedious operation. We observe with startled surprise the huge bunches of muscle, knotted and corded, which line the mighty forepaws and a momentary feeling of regret goes through us, that a minute piece of lead has stilled for ever this massive organic machine which now lies before us, a mere lump of indecent-looking, bloody meat. The flaying proceeds industriously. Each paw may take an hour, claw by claw, pad by pad, joint by joint. No keen knife must slip and tear the precious trophy. The skin is cut from below the underlip straight down the belly to the tip of the tail and up the inside of each leg along the middle of the white hair with which the inside of the leg is covered. The skull is removed and roughly cleaned, afterwards being buried for ants to complete the process. The skull, of course, will go back into the finished skin, when mounted, although a false tongue will fill the mouth. After stripping the skin from the carcass and cleaning away blood-stains with water, it is spread, hair downwards, on clean straw and every vestige of flesh and fat scraped off. This has to be done at once, three or four men working on the skin together as, if any fat or flesh is allowed to adhere to the skin, the hair will fall out.

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

To facilitate this thorough cleaning process the skin of the ears and head must be carefully prepared. When the skin is nearly clean it is pegged out in the shade, hair downward, nails or thin pegs being used, and stretched absolutely taut. A mixture of powdered alum and wood ashes is rubbed in and when the skin is quite dry it is hung up for a day or two, then carefully folded and packed, together with the smell, into a box ready for dispatch to the taxidermist.

Such is the end of 'Stripes.' Harassed and harried, bewildered and baffled, he played a losing game to the bitter end. To follow him is not for children; and there are disadvantages, as I have tried to show. But the dangers of jungle shooting are often more imagined than real. If the novice listens to experience, uses discretion and keeps his head, all should be well.

A fairly decent shot, behind an efficient modern weapon, holds all the 'aces' in this game of *shikar*, whilst the poor old tiger holds the 'deuce.'

If, however, the unexpected happens and things are not as they should be, then there is the 'deuce' to pay and 'Stripes,' dominant in the might of his paw, does not hesitate to extract his pound of flesh.

Which, of course, is as it should be.



We had just finished *tiffin* and Davidson and I were having a gossip in his bungalow at Pendra Road. He was a forest officer with one of the leading Calcutta timber houses, and his duties necessarily took him into the back-waters of the pristine jungle. He had just returned from such a trip of some months' duration, and I inquired as to the big-game fruits of the expedition.

"I'll let you see some tiger-skins that have just come back from the taxidermists," he said.

THE WHEELS OF IND

In an adjoining room he showed me four splendid trophies, a tigress and three full-grown cubs.

"Not bad going, Davidson, for a few weeks' trip."

"Not weeks, my lad, one night's work."

I looked surprised, and no wonder. Four tigers in a few hours is some achievement, and at that time Davidson's feat constituted a record. He unfolded the following story of his night-time escapade.

Arriving at a rest-house far removed from human habitation, set alone in the throbbing wild, he unpacked prior to having tea. He had just commenced his meal, when one of his men arrived breathless with the encouraging news that a tiger had just killed near the house and would presumably return to its 'kill' very shortly. The Western sky was aflame with the glory of another departing day, but Davidson judged he would have sufficient time to bag 'Stripes' ere the dark had fallen. He picked up his rifle, put four cartridges in the magazine and one in the breech and pushed off, with his informant leading. They arrived at the 'kill' within a few minutes. Davidson climbed an adjacent tree suitably overlooking the body and awaited the return of the killer, whilst the Indian returned to the house.

Straight ahead down the glade in front came the striped slaughterer, unconscious of danger, unhesitant and unconcerned. Davidson 'drew a bead' on him and covered him on to the 'kill.' He was just preparing for the finale, when to his surprise he saw another tiger coming from the jungle on his left towards the meat. He put up his gun and awaited developments.

He gasped with astonishment when a third brute followed in the track of the first, and almost fell off the tree with amazed excitement when a fourth ambled into the arena from the right and growled and snarled with his pals over the meal. How to account for the

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

four live tigers was difficult, but he knew definitely how to account for four dead ones.

Recovering from his shock he steadied himself, took careful aim and fired. Two swift shots, and two tigers rolled over as dead as the 'kill' beside them. The remaining two, startled to sudden movement by this unseen menace, made for the protection of the forest. Again the rifle spoke and the message was received. One of the finest shots in the Central Provinces was behind the delivery. A third animal sprawled grotesquely on its back, feebly wagging its feet in ante-mortem convulsions. The last of the quartet glared around in bewildered amazement, its flashing eyes swept round the charnel-house and glimpsed the slayer in the branches. It stood irresolute for a few moments. Again that thunder roar and lightning flash, and a red-hot flame seared its shoulders. Irresolute no longer, with jaws agape, thirsting for blood, a sheer fury on four legs, it came for Davidson in his arboreal perch. Again he shot, in an attempt to stop the last survivor in its pain-maddened rush, but with undiminished vigour it made towards him. He realized with a dismal foreboding that his last shot had gone. Five rounds was certainly ample for the usual solitary wanderer, or at the remote outside, two, but even Old Moore with a surfeit of almanacs couldn't have foretold the approach of four.

The stricken brute came straight for the tree and attempted to clamber up. Time and again it clawed and sprang, stripping the bark and tearing deep into the wood. It was badly hurt, however, and despite its raging and spitting made little headway. Davidson stuck on like glue to his protection and hoped for the best. At length the baffled brute dragged itself away into the undergrowth. Hesitant and cautious, David-

THE WHEELS OF IND

son eventually began to descend. As he got lower an ominous growl from near by warned him he was being watched and the sudden rush of 'Stripes' visibly confirmed the truth of the warning. Like a monkey up a stick he shinned up again, and after one or two further attempts, equally futile, resigned himself to a night aloft. He heard no welcome sound of human presence, only from below him in the darkened gloom came the moans of the stricken tiger, arising at intervals to a crescendo of rage and pain. A century of dark wore slowly through. Cramped and chilled, cold but collected, he watched a hopeful dawn. The growing smudge of light soaking upward into the sombre page of night revealed the tiger still maintaining its watch below. It looked aloft and saw its persecutor. Slowly dragging itself upward it stood upon its crippled legs, defiant still, full of power and purpose. Getting down from the tree, Davidson decided, was going to be a bit of a problem. Suddenly, across the noise of the awakening jungle came a sound which brought relief to the marooned man. The voice of his 'bearer' calling, "Sahib, Sahib."

"Look out!" warned Davidson. "Don't come nearer! There's a wounded tiger lying under the tree I'm in. Go back to the rest-house and get the cartridge-bag. Climb up a tree as near as you can to mine and throw me a cartridge."

A little further waiting, lightened now by hope. Presently Davidson heard the anxious 'bearer' calling from an adjacent tree. Setting themselves in their respective perches they commenced a game of catch-as-catch-can. Round after round was thrown. The first few fell short. The next few, the range discovered, rattled round the tree or, thrown too eagerly, went tantalizingly past.

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

Eureka ! At last the clutching fingers caught a speeding cartridge. Damnation ! It was for another rifle.

Back again to the old game. In the strengthening sunlight the brass flickered and flashed.

Got it !

Click : breech open ; snap : breech closed. Bang !!

The vigil was over.



Wandering once along the banks of a tributary of the Mahanadi a jungle native excitedly called out that there was a crocodile up a tree. I hurried to the spot, anxious to see this zoological freak. Instead, I found a species of iguana about 3 ft. long. I blew its head off with a shot-gun, and my jungle companions immediately ate it.

There were plenty of crocodiles about the place, however. These brutes are found all over the country in all sorts of water, rivers and streams, ditches and *jheels*, and in the great *bunded* tanks which house the inland villages' water supplies.

We once got a young crocodile out of the turntable pit in Bilaspur engine-shed. Doubtless it had wandered from some neighbouring water. It did not wander back.

Of the twelve different species of crocodile found in the world, India possesses three, which are a good deal more than sufficient. They are : the *Mugger*, or Marsh Crocodile ; the Estuary Crocodile ; and the *Gavial* or River Crocodile.

The *mugger* is by far the most common and best known, being found in practically all parts. He is a coward and a bully. A fierce, sulky and rapacious brute, he yearly accounts for many deaths of both people and beasts, dragging to destruction 136 luckless souls during a recent year. See him as he lies on the brown-baked

THE WHEELS OF IND

bank, silent and sinister, out of the water, but with his head facing it. He may be a *mugger*, but he's no mug. He will eat anything he can get, from old boots to old women, from *muggers* hailing from foreign waters to comrade crocs. of his own family. It is generally the weaker sex and children, however, who fall victims to the great brute that lurks waiting at the fords, or where the shelving bank allows the housewife to fill her brass pot or lave her heated face.

The collection of bangles and feminine jewellery so often found in the stomachs of slaughtered crocodiles tells its own grisly tale. Inside him too are often found stones, which, no doubt, he swallows to aid digestion. Certain wild tribes maintain he swallows one on the morning of every birthday, but as he lives well over a hundred years, this habit must eventually make him too heavy to float. Even if he sank he wouldn't perish. His design is perfect. He can breathe under water, open his mouth and rend his prey below the surface, and laugh at death by drowning. His back, tail and underpart are encased in a suit of mail, as protective as steel armour and nearly as invulnerable. He even defies modern weapons. His jaws are a nightmare. Dentists he has no use for. Periodically he renews his teeth, the new members pushing the old ones out of place. His eyes, shielded by bone, rise just above the water and he cruises along like a half-submerged submarine and infinitely more deadly. His powers of sight and hearing are acute, but he has one aversion. He simply detests being tickled. With a hide like his, one would have thought he would have been impervious to barbed wire. As a matter of fact, the middle of each scale contains a very sensitive nerve centre. It is definitely asserted that a crocodile if tickled will loosen his grip. Well, I am prepared to admit the assertion.

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

All the tons of theory in the world are preferable to the ounce of experience necessary to confirm the statement.

It was at Sheonath Bridge that I had most opportunity for observing *muggers* and their merry ways. On a broad stretch of marshy ground about five miles long, many of them lived a life of death and destruction. As we stealthily approached the water, huge log-like saurians dozing in the Indian sunshine rolled into the water with hardly a splash, and propelled by the massive, muscular tail went through the water at an amazing speed. Scarcely a ripple marked the progress of the huge bulk, but now and then the eyes, raised above the water like a tell-tale periscope, showed the path of the monster.

Finding them much too wary, I despaired of getting in a shot at one on land. I fired at several who cruised along within near range. On more than one occasion I distinctly saw the bullets bounce off the mailed hide and ricochet over the water. The brutes treated my high-explosive bullets like so many peas, and I eventually got fed up with playing 'ducks-and-drakes' at ninepence a time.

To be effective, a bullet must enter a vital spot, of which there are two, the brain and the neck. The crocodile is not overburdened with brains, consequently his brain-pan is not extensive. In any case killing him in the water is usually a waste of time. I once shot one through the eye and penetrated the brain. He sank and when the body was recovered three days later it was rotten and torn.

He must be stunned, out of the water, by a well-placed shot and then finished off before he can re-enter his native element.

He displays a remarkable speed on the land, and on some crocodile-haunted rivers Government has been

THE WHEELS OF IND

compelled to cut down all trees and other cover on the banks. The crocodiles used to lie up in this shelter and when some luckless, unsuspecting fellow came along between them and the water, they rushed down with the speed of a torpedo and scrambled the poor unfortunate into the river. Once in, he didn't get out again.

Whilst the crocodile is venerated by many Hindu castes and little temples are found on many waters which he inhabits, in charge of some holy Brahmin, who summons his grisly charges by means of a bell at feeding-time, it is to be acknowledged he is not altogether popular.

Many and weird are the means used to ensnare the lurker by the ford and the watcher by the well. Apart from straight stalking and shooting, the crocodile is often baited by means of live dogs. At any time the *mugger* will waddle any distance within reason for a meal, but for a nice live juicy pup he positively gallops. The pup is tied to a stake (otherwise he wouldn't stay), and the armed watcher takes up his position between the dog and the water. Usually the dog howls voluntarily through fright, but if he is stricken dumb by an excess of fear, he is goaded into yelping by sundry applications from a thorn branch to awake the echoing morn and incidentally call up the itinerant undertaker. The crocodile eventually hears the call for breakfast and at last the dark waters slowly move to a faint ripple as the two-eyed periscope cuts through the limpid stream. His customary caution forgotten, he ruthlessly pursues his headlong career, out of the water, and up the bank towards the Heaven-sent meal.

Crack goes the rifle, and a well-placed shot stops the further progress of the mailed juggernaut. This is important. Not only is the main objective achieved, namely the destruction of the four-legged body-snatcher,

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

but at the same time the pup is reprieved, to be brought out as a free-will offering on some other occasion.

It is impossible to describe in detail the many other methods adopted to lure to destruction the ever-watchful destroyer. Some are swift and comparatively painless ; others slow and sure, but horrible in their efficiency. When one remembers those little episodes by India's peaceful river-banks and meandering streams, one's pity for the crocodile is swamped by the reflection that he who lives by violence must inevitably perish by the same.

A village cow, the proud joy and sole possession of some sunburnt toiler of the soil, comes down to the river as the long shadows steal across its placid surface. Dipping its muzzle into the stream, it drinks long and deep of the cooling water. Scarcely a ripple breaks the calm until suddenly the nose of the cow is caught in a pincer-like grip and a relentless and maddening pull drags it slowly downwards. The stricken beast howls with the agony of pain, its eyes start from its head, its feet vainly endeavour to find a purchase on the slippery clay in an effort to stop the remorseless drag, slowly but surely, pulling it into the stream. The waters lap around its head, higher and higher, until the poor beast, still fixed in those unseen jaws of iron, suffocates. A violent scurry in the water, a rising clamour of repeated splashings, the tell-tale ripples of approaching reptiles drawn by the scent of blood, the snapping of jaws and a ghastly tearing of the dead beast is the last act of this little drama of the Indian countryside. Slowly the eddying ripples merge into the still bosom of the stream, the picture is erased and the virgin canvas stands again. Those bubbles of froth and spume, however, which lie alongside the rushes are not reddened with the reflected glory of the expiring sun ; and the

THE WHEELS OF IND

puddled bank where the dead cow drank tells its own stark ghastly tale. Small wonder, then, if sometimes the methods employed for the elimination of the *mugger* are ruthless in their action.

I once met a party of Anglo-Indians who were shooting *mugger* on a commercial basis. Their method was devilish but drastic. Commerce and sport seldom blend, and whilst I mention their methods I do not condone them. Armed with a shot-gun, they proceeded along the side of a *mugger*-infested stream. Presently one of the armoured cruisers observed their progress and ogled them with his eyes from the presumed immunity of the water. Doubtless in his cunning he waited for them to stumble and fall in. Ever loth to leave a likely meal, the *mugger* followed their march, so intent on the possibility of the strangers dropping in for lunch that he gradually got quite near to the bank. As soon as he arrived within range, he received the contents of both barrels smack in the eyes. Blinded, the stricken brute dived beneath. The scent of blood brought up his cannibalistic companions, who straightway made for the wounded, sightless monster. Game to the last, he fought a losing battle, whilst the water boiled and churned with the turmoil raging below. Retreating step by step, he was driven to the hoped-for safety of the land. As the blinded warrior dragged his lacerated bulk out of the water, his hopes and brains alike were shattered by the guns of the exultant executioners waiting to receive him.



Crocodiles must possess a quaint sense of humour. Everyone has heard of the saying 'tickled to death,' or of something or someone being 'kidded' to the same grim ending. The *mugger* is a living or dead illustra-

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

tion of the literal truth of both these statements. He is 'kidded' to destruction in a particularly horrible way.

Two young goats are procured. One is killed and the skin removed, leaving the head and legs intact. The cavity thus formed is filled with unslaked lime, the incision being afterwards loosely stitched up. The result is a crude imitation of the work of the taxidermist. The live kid is fastened to a stake near the river, whilst a watchful Indian hides up near by. The bleats of the tethered animal bring out the crocodile, who leaves the water and waddles towards the gift-offering. The watcher springs to life and with shouts and curses scares the *mugger* back into the stream. Immediately, with the dexterity of a conjurer, the goats are changed. The lime-filled skin is fastened to the post and left standing, as if alive. The other kid is taken a short distance away and sundry applications of nipping fingers produce again a series of bleats dear to the ears of the crocodile, who still hangs around waiting for another chance. He is allowed to take it. Satisfied the watcher has now gone, he emerges once more and waddles straight up to the kid. Without hesitation, he snaps it in his jaws, with a preliminary crunch or two bolts the lot, and returns to the water.

For a time all is well. After a while the crocodile comes to the surface, swimming erratically up and down the river, its jaws agape, snapping and restless. Its tail thrashes the water in fury and agony. At last it comes on to the bank and heedless of missiles lies gasping with its jaws lathered in blood and foam, until a well-directed hit from a spear or an axe puts an end to its sufferings. As soon as the reptile swallowed the stuffed kid, the unslaked lime loosened in its stomach and started eating into its bowels. The more water it

THE WHEELS OF IND

drank, the more its agony increased, until death put an end to its torture.

There are innumerable instances of various types of lizards who are extremely susceptible to tickling and lie impassive under its obviously soothing influence. The Mohanas of Sind are aware of this and tickle the great brainless brutes of the waters to death as easily as they would one of the smaller fellows who live in holes and trees on land. Their methods, however, are more pleasant than that of the Promethean gift of lime-filled kids. There is no doubt the *muggers* in Sind slide away from life as in a dream, drugged to oblivion by the dull opiate of sensory satisfaction into easeful death. A man rides the water on a hollow copper pot, and eventually locates a crocodile lying in the mud. He places a stick through the water on to the reptile's head and once the *mugger* feels the pressure of this stick he is to all intents and purposes incapable of movement. Other men come into the water, dive in and get a rope round the petrified reptile, who refuses to play. They immediately haul him out. If the crocodile gets into deep water, in narrow channels, all overhanging reeds and bushes are burnt and the reptile again located with a stick. A small net is placed over the head and still the big sulking brute does not move. Apparently the *mugger* cannot fathom the meaning of the stick business. As there are no survivors it is impossible for future clients to be warned to beware of taps on the head with small sticks. The crocodile lies still and inert. Again a man gets into the water and, in many cases with the *mugger's* jaws actually touching his bare legs, he calmly ties a rope round its neck and fore-legs, after which his pals promptly proceed to haul their prey ashore. Crocodile-charming seems about as innocuous as, if rather more exciting than, trout-tickling.

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

Another crocodile-catching contraption is made by fixing two sticks, pointed at both ends, crosswise inside the bait. To this crudely fashioned cross is fastened a long rope. The *mugger* swallows the spiked bait and believing possession to be nine points of the law, foolishly refuses to leave go. He is dragged out of the water and is dead before he discovers that his legal knowledge is extremely elementary.



It is the time of the *Mowha* flower. Its sickly scent 'intoxicates the hot and quivering air.' Soon the berries will intoxicate both the joyous jungle-folk and the dull-witted, sweet-toothed bear. Fermented and boiled, the fruit distils a potent brew, which for a brief time sweeps away from the minds of the forest tribes the ever-present worries of a hard world. Each morning they collect the berries and set up their primitive stills. Each dawning likewise finds the black bears up the *Mowha* trees, drawing their supplies 'direct from the wood.' If the nectar soon dulls the wits of the higher animal, its effect on the bear is even more quickly manifest. He is soon fuddled. At any ordinary time he is a careless brute. He shuffles along, surly and bad-tempered, preying on none, the prey of none. Ferocious, but not a fighter, inoffensive, but well nigh invulnerable, he pretty well does as he likes. If a wave of weariness passes over him, he simply curls up and goes to sleep on the spot.

Why is it then that the black bear, a vegetarian, content to leave and be left alone, exacts such a terrible toll of life each year? Why, for example, in 1927, were the souls of seventy-eight jungle-wanderers violently and ruthlessly torn from their bodies by *Baloo*, the bear? Unlike the killers and hunters, he is slow-witted, and

THE WHEELS OF IND

three parts blind. Rolled up under some bush, or asprawl in the brown grass, he sleeps through the day. The luckless wanderer, unsuspecting, treads upon him and rouses the sleeping inferno. Panic-stricken and bewildered, like a flash the half-asleep, dazed bear rises from his slumber. Blindly he smashes out all around in his effort to fly from the intruder, thrashing the air with his fore-paws, whilst his little, stupid, pig-like eyes roll with rage and fear. Slash across the face of the awakener comes that nightmare of a fore-paw, long-nailed and curved, the hind-leg similarly equipped sweeps like lightning across the stomach of the unfortunate, gutting him like a shelled pod, whilst the slobbering jaws seek to bite off the top of the skull as if it were papier mâché. It is all over. The horrible, ghastly shell of what was a man lies bloody on the ground, whilst away, still panic-stricken, crashing through the undergrowth, goes *Baloo* the ripper.

Small wonder, then, that when a shooting friend suggested to me that the best way to get a black bear was to get up to him and throw pepper in his eyes and, in the resultant confusion, stick a knife in his heart I threw cold water on the scheme. I agreed the idea might be sound, but if he and I wished to remain sound, the thing should remain as an idea and stop at that.

This, however, is getting away from beery bears in nature's brewery. One morning, very early, as we trudged along the dusty road that wound around and beyond the *Mowha* trees, we came across two drunkards. One, a brown-skinned son of the soil, lay somnolent and heavy with drunken stupor, whilst across the path a few yards ahead, *Baloo*, the bear, drugged by the same potent nectar, slumbered away, deaf to the world. The sight of either to the other in normal circumstances would have been sufficient to put much space between them.

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

Now, wrapped in the fumes from the little *Mowha* berry, they lay almost side by side like convivial companions from the same ale-house, who homeward-bound had tarried by the wayside. They were both carried back to the village. The erring lad, still tight and asleep; the too-confiding bear stone-dead, his skull smashed in by many axe-blows.

In the same district a friend of mine came across three black bears lying in a depression amongst some rocks. Cheek by jowl they lay together, fast asleep like revellers from the feast of Bacchus touched by the hand of Circe. The *shikari* with him unhesitatingly went into their midst, and actually lifting their shaggy heads pointed into their unheeding ears and whispered: "Come and shoot them in here, Sahib."

It would have been a massacre of sleeping babes in the wood. My friend definitely declined the rôle of slaughterer and passed on to look for the teetotallers.



It is to be admitted that the jungle is not exactly the happiest of places for promiscuous, haphazard hiking. Caution and forethought are essential. Familiarity may breed indifference, but not contempt. Just like the old 'shellback' who roamed the seven seas and got used to being drowned, the sojourner in the wild lands of Sunny Hind soon ceases to be really alarmed at the dangers which may surround him. In his sojourn, however, he absorbs, consciously or unconsciously, the sinister spirit of the wild. Peace and quietness one moment; death and destruction the next. Life, pulsating and throbbing; death, silent but decisive.

And so through these wilds I went, noting here and there how prowling, man-eating tigers, rambling elephants and devastating white ants all joined to swell

THE WHEELS OF IND

the forces arrayed against the spanning of distance. I travelled in a variety of ways. In the guard's van, on the engine foot-plate, or like a respectable passenger in the train itself. Or sometimes seated on the cow-catcher of the locomotive as it pushed its way through the wild ; slightly chilled in front by the night air as it came upon me in its swift rush, whilst my back was uncomfortably hot from the heated smoke-box behind. On either side the jungle lies, breaking here and there into open spaces, where herds of deer can be seen grazing in the gloom. On we go through these Arabian nights of silver and shadow whilst the powerful monster behind chug-chugs its way up the rocky heights of the Central Ghauts.

At one small jungle outpost, the far-off reaches of the forest spawned forth an unsophisticated jungle-tribe who gazed with awe upon the snorting marvel of Western transport. As soon as the engine stopped, they swarmed all over, reminding me of Gulliver when he awakened from his first sleep in Lilliput and found the little fellows in command. This particular crowd stayed by the line-side for a week, till their wonder abated and they retired to the fastnesses of their far-away home to broadcast the tale of their discovery and probably to be dubbed liars by unbelieving stay-at-homes.

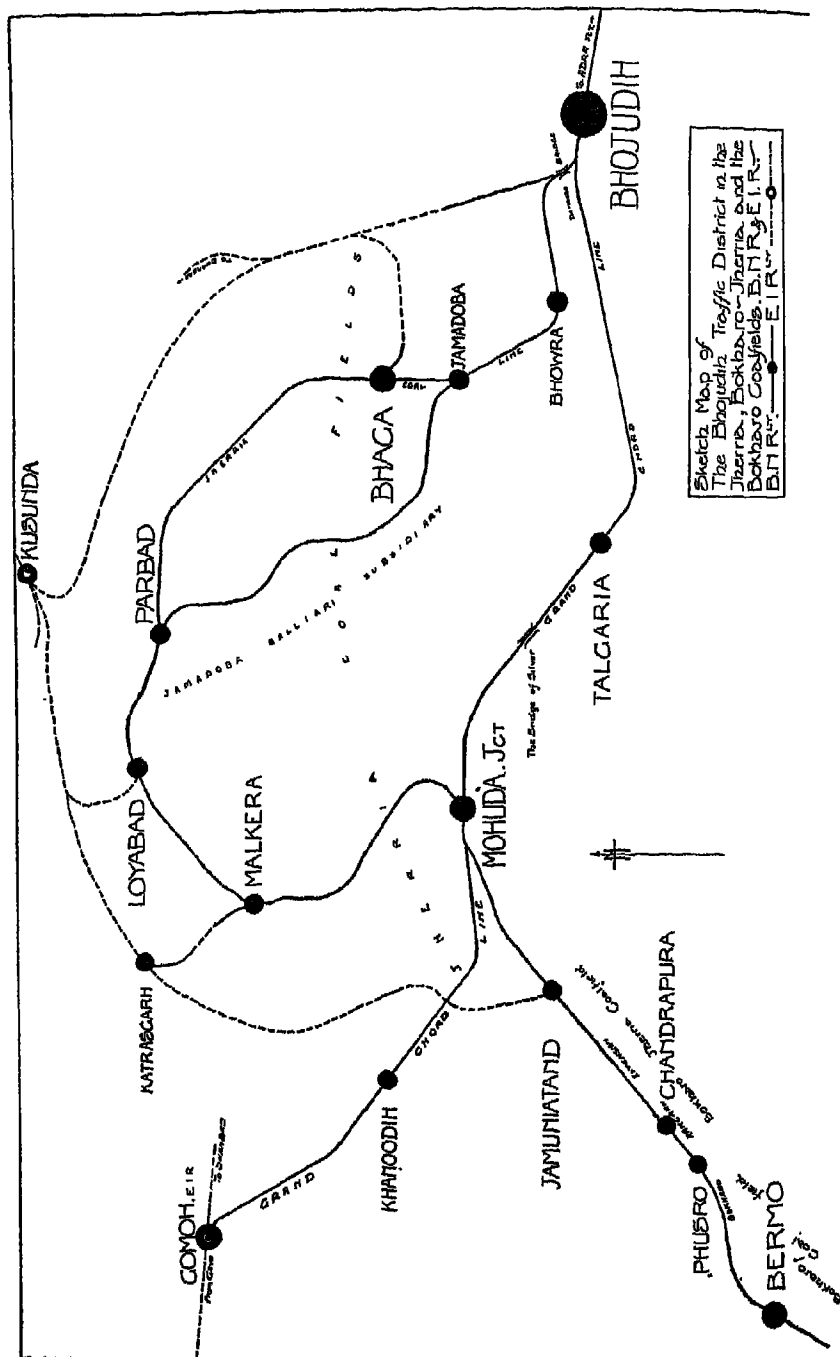
Or again mile after mile on an open trolley, through a furnace of shimmering heat which recoils from the track ballast in hot blasts, the trolley-men behind running with bare unerring feet on steel rails which burn the Western skin. Along the level we go, up the grade until, the summit reached, like the 'dandy horse' of old, the trolley-men jump on board, and we rattle away down the slope till the level is reached again. Up and down and back again, here to-day, there to-morrow, I went, travelling days and staying hours or reversing the

CAMEOS OF THE WILD

sequence as occasion dictated. Fever-laden mosquitoes, irritating myriads of flies and insect pests, prickly heat and perennial perspiration, scorpions and snakes, sleepless nights and hopeless dawns came my way, as they ever do to those who serve the jungle.

The jungle, the arena in which many tragedies and too few comedies are lived and played, what of it? It thrives and grows, its green, brown-spumed waves lapping against the outposts of materialism. Triumphant it flourishes, beckoning with insistent fingers to those who love it. Its dawns pregnant with promise, as one shivers in the cold air which comes like wine from the Central Hills. Its stark beauty of the daytime as it lies panting in the glaring sun. Its nights, dreams of silver and black, ghostly and foreboding, alive with unseen movement like the dark depths of the sea. India's minority may clamour for Swaraj and Self-Government, its thousands-years-old religions may stand at the bar of the World's tribunal in an effort to justify their existence, but the jungle and its folk live on unheeding, living, mating and dying in conformity with their age-old laws and paying scant attention to the babel of India's polyglot millions.

Of that great triumvirate, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the jungle recks not, of Moslem and Christian it knows not, but heedless of the challenge of India's many Gods and creeds, rolls over hill and plain, content to know that in itself it breathes the essence of them all.



CHAPTER VI
BHOJUDI—BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH
DIAMONDS

ONE hot-weather day I sat in the dimmed control office at Bilaspur, at peace with the world. Through the *khus-khus*-lined doorways and window-frames, the hot blasts from outside were cooled to a lesser heat as they passed through the fibrous root matting, drenched in water which dried almost as fast as the harassed *pani-wallah*, or waterman, could throw it on. The creaking, squeaking, leather-edged *punkahs* stirred the warm air till it smote on the face like the breath of evening kine. Now and then the drowsy afternoon woke to action as the control telephone bells whirled and rang, signalling the progress of each moving train for hundreds of miles. The master 'phone on my table shattered my peace. I lifted the receiver to my ear to be greeted by a blast of blasphemy, hot and sulphurous. For a moment I thought I had been put through to a broadcast from Hades. I rang for the controller on duty.

"What's wrong at Paraghat?" I queried.

"Some of the Bilaspur lads, home from school, have ridden on a freight train to Paraghat. They are now in the station office there. They've driven the Station Master frantic, commandeered the office and telephone and have given me no end of cheek and impertinence. I switched them through to you, so that you could hear for yourself."

THE WHEELS OF IND

"What is the next train in from Paraghat?" I asked.

"No. 236, she crossed 227 at Akaltara, on time."

He told me the names of the boys, one or two of whom I knew were young rips. Irregular riding on freight trains was, of course, merely a boyish escapade, but scaring Indian Station Masters stiff and upsetting the working of the control were beyond excuse. In any case their astonishing command of strong language called for attention. I sent for the father of one of the boys, knowing he was in the station, and outlined the case to him. I suggested it was a matter rather for domestic action than for official censure. He agreed. When No. 236 *up* pulled into the Bilaspur Yard the hilarious band of youthful desperadoes was aboard. Blissfully ignorant of the wrath to come, they rolled off the train into the outstretched arms of several waiting parents. Those who were thus represented got what was coming to them on the spot on the usual spot. The remainder collected their rewards at spasmodic intervals, as and when their irate fathers came home again off duty.

I was as blissfully ignorant of what lay in wait for me at the end of the journey that day as were the boys.

I had just bathed and changed when a telegram was handed in at the bungalow.

"Mr. Mitchell, A.T.S., will take duty Bhojudih early as possible."

Here was I, comfortably settled in the Central Provinces, suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, ordered to the Coalfields of Bihar and Orissa, hundreds of miles away. That is India. Just as you get nicely parked in one spot, the powers that be hurl you to another as far away and as different from the first as it seems possible for them to find. One grouses and grumbles, of course, unless



THE DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS TRAFFIC OFFICE STAFF AT BUQJ'UDIH, 1921
The author is seated in the centre

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

it be the rare chance of a move to a 'better 'ole.' Excellent training, though.

I had heard of the Bhojudih district. Who hadn't?

It had been pictured to me as a last hope, a land of lost souls. For years each discontented, awkward subordinate had been shunted to the Sargasso of Bhojudih. This may, or may not, have been a wise policy, but nevertheless it functioned. Whenever the main line shrieked for empty wagons which were not, or alternatively the Bilaspur marshalling yards got blocked and unmanageable with laden traffic, with Headquarters yelling for someone's blood, I sought the reason, and found it invariably the same—Bhojudih. It seemed to be a ravenous maw devouring empties and spawning forth loaded wagons with a bewildering inconsistency. Technically and officially I knew, despite its small mileage, it was a prolific source of traffic and revenue. The haze of rumour and storied legend which hung around it, however, rather perturbed me. And before me lay the telegraphed official order to 'pull up my socks' and 'get'.

When I informed my colleague on his arrival for tea his comment was characteristic.

"I wouldn't go to Bhojudih for a pension!"

He reeled off a wholesale condemnation of the place, dwelling luridly on its heat, work and mosquitoes, its utter isolation, its heart-breaking idiosyncrasies and the unmentionable horrors which the folk in Calcutta issued if things went wrong and the wheels ceased to revolve correctly.

"Ever been to Bhojudih?" I asked, after he had exhausted himself.

"No! and what's more, I don't want to!"

It appeared to me that the most vehement denouncers of this outcaste area were those who had never seen

THE WHEELS OF IND

it. From which I inferred that, like most other things, one had to see and judge for oneself. In any case, mine not to reason why, mine but to go and try.

I had been definitely advised that servants on the Coalfield were almost as scarce as icicles. On the day I left Bilaspur I sent for Kasim, my 'bearer', and informed him of my imminent departure for the never-never land and asked him if he still wished to serve me there. He received the information with the invariable Indian impassiveness, as if such violent disruptions were hourly occurrences. As a matter of fact, in that curious way common to Indian servants, he would most certainly know of my transfer before I did.

"*Acha*, Sahib, I go."

In my innocence I rejoiced ; for Kasim, whilst by no means a paragon, was much more than merely passable. He requested his month's pay, in order, I presumed, to leave Bilaspur a free man. Still innocent, I handed over the 20 rupees which was the monthly bond that bound Kasim and me together.

"Don't forget, boy," I reminded him, "pack everything ready and be on the mail to-night."

Mail time came and the usual crowd came to the station too. The electric searchlight, like the eye of a cyclops, came speeding in from the West, lighting up for a brief space as it rounded the curve the folk on the platform. Upon Kasim it shone not, for Kasim was not. I had my kit thrown into the carriage and waited while the engines were changed, expecting Kasim to come barging along at any moment, maybe tight, but certainly tangible. The Conductor Guard in his usual courteous tone requested permission to start the train and I entered the compartment, still idiotically looking for the lost sheep.

A series of whistles, the green sheen of lamps, a

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

brief tug and we glided smoothly away. Kasim had let me down and I felt disappointed in him. I needn't have been. It was my own stupidity that was to blame. I had given him all the rupees he could hope to get and thus fortified he had laid the bogy of Bhojudih. The sahib could go if he wished, but from what he had heard of the place it was no spot for a soft life for 'bearers.'

Despite his fears, however, if I had withheld his rupees, he would have gone half-way round India with me in order to get his cash.



Sini Junction at 3.36 and I left the Down Mail in the moonlight. As she steamed out I glanced at my watch. Dead on time, another challenge to the slow-moving folk of India. For those who have not travelled over the long miles of India's railroads it is difficult to realize the speed of her 'key' trains and the remarkable punctuality of their running. Special efforts have admittedly always been made to expedite the trans-peninsular traffic, but now the demand for swift travel and actual arrival and departure times synchronized with those shown in the timetables is everywhere evident. Indian railroads are nothing if they are not modern. In 1932, 83.5 per cent of the passenger trains run lost no time on the journey.

Out of Sini by the Chakardharpore-Adra passenger, to rumble along to Adra, 54 miles away. At last I had arrived at the threshold of the Jharia Coalfield, to see things for myself.

I went across to the bungalow of the Coal Manager, a senior officer in charge of the railway activities in the coalfields, and despite the fact that he and I had never met before, his wife and he greeted me like a

THE WHEELS OF IND

long-lost friend and soon made me entirely at home. That is India again. The Coal Manager knew his job, and I thought I knew mine, so between us we soon got down to 'brass tacks.' He outlined the policy of the railroad in the coal areas, prefacing his remarks by saying :

"Half of what you may have heard of the Bhojudih district is not true and the other half is lies!"

He showed me the railway lay-out, like a drunken spider's web, circling the field and branching off at every angle in order to serve the mines. Many important projects were in the air, the enlargement of the Bhojudih Yard, the creation of new marshalling sidings at Anara outside the coalfield proper and the opening up of new stations and facilities at many points. I soon realized that, here as elsewhere, the Bengal-Nagpur Railway administration were thinking big and acting big as well as being big. I absorbed the topographical details and lay-out from the map and awaited actual inspection.

When I swung out from Adra to Bhojudih, 22 miles to the North-West, the Coal Manager said :

"Well, good luck, Mitchell, you'll be on your own at Bhojudih, but I'm here if you want me. I hope you won't. Keep things moving and Bhojudih Yard clear and you'll be all right."



So this was Bhojudih ! The slow passenger train came to a stand at a platform surrounded on all sides by wagons, a little island in a sea of traffic. As far as the eye could see, a huge barren waste of bare earth, brown and ugly, blistering in the hot sun. One or two hang-dog, dusty trees, which appeared to have escaped the wholesale denudation and seemed ashamed

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

for having done so, stuck themselves, desolate and forlorn, on a heap of naked earth, whilst near by the Damooda River in a waste of sand trickled along, weary and unlovely, as if oppressed with the stark sterility all around.

Lying at the bottle-necked entrance to the coalfields, the marshalling yard of Bhojudih, bottle-necked itself, was the key to the whole position. It was my job to keep that bottle-neck open and Heaven help me if I didn't ! The district was small, absurdly so when compared with the one I had just come from. It only spanned some 70 miles of running track with innumerable sidings, but each yard was more irritating than each mile I had left behind.

The Officer I had come to relieve had been there many years. Jubilantly he turned over to me and went on leave, leaving me monarch of all I surveyed.

Everywhere I went I saw the same thing. Apart from the pioneer tentacles of newer branch lines which still unfolded themselves through verdant greenery as they sought to tap new areas, the coalfield proper was a nightmare and an affront to the eyes. It was the price Industrial India must pay for her commercial exploitation. Giant scars cut through the raw earth ; huge slivers of rock and soil showed everywhere. All around, the head-gear of colliery after colliery told its own tale of the spoil being won underneath. Batteries of coke ovens, smoking sulphurously, beacons the night, whilst up and down the coal trains carried away the black wealth to the industrial world of Hind. In each siding as I passed I noticed endless lines of coolies, both men and women, carrying the coal in baskets on their heads up long planks to fill the waiting 44-ton coal wagons. Primitive maybe, but often cheaper than machinery.

THE WHEELS OF IND

As I wandered about the district I constantly met gangs of colliers. Until I was nearly on them I could hardly determine whether they were coming or going from toil so little difference did the coal dust make to their appearance. At times, I could almost imagine myself back in my native North Country if it had not been for the blasting heat and the mosquitoes. The bare gaunt earth flung back the dancing heat rays till the eyes hurt and the world at times went blinding dark. As for the mosquitoes, it was alleged they were so vicious, they descended the mine shafts and bit the naked miners working at the coal face.



The Jharia Coalfield lies in the Damooda Valley in the Manbhum district of Bihar and Orissa, roughly about 160 miles to the North-West of Calcutta. It was not until about 1890 that really definite steps were taken to exploit the vast coal beds, despite the fact that huge outcrops occurred in many spots. The workings vary from *katcha* outfits, simply scraping the surface, to great modern organizations comparable in many respects with those of the West. The little fellow, like many little fellows, is a nuisance. His methods are primitive and sometimes alarming, but he merrily goes along, undercutting his big brothers and knocking the bottom out of markets. The big fellows naturally shout, for the intensive competition is a severe restriction on the raising of capital and the necessary and desired improvement of the field as a whole. The methods of certain Indian capitalists also leave much to be desired. In the monsoons the surface-scratcher leaves his flooded holes and sacks his men. Recruited very often from hundreds of miles away, the out-of-works roam the district, ripe for any mischief. Robbery and

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

violence attend the monsoon rains at such times. On one occasion an Indian-owned colliery on the banks of the Damooda River took fire (the Jharia field is particularly susceptible to spontaneous combustion). The bright lads in charge let in the river to quench the fire. It did ! It also put paid by flooding to several adjacent collieries and when I left the coalfields, litigation instigated by enraged Noths was waxing fast and furious.

The ash content of Jharia coal is higher and its calorific value lower than that of British coal, but its price and the nationalistic aspirations of the country ensure its increasing consumption. For years the Indian railroads have used no other coal for steaming purposes. During 1931-2, 20,514,597 tons of coal were mined in British India and of this 2,894,281 tons flooded into the Calcutta and Kidderpore Docks, aided by helpful rail rates, to be exported to many depots in the East which previously existed only as bases for the storage of Welsh anthracite. It goes in its hundreds of thousands of tons to the great industrial works, which of recent years India has so prolifically reared. Iron-works, steelworks, tin mills, sheet mills, cement works, engineering and bridge building works, cotton, woollen and jute mills and so on. A brief sojourn in Jharia soon tells the inquirer where some of the overseas trade of Britain has gone. And unfortunately for us it has taken a single ticket for the journey.

Whilst the coal seams usually vary in thickness from 2 ft. to 50 ft., with the best seams at about 28 ft., there are even thicker seams still in the Bokaro field. This field extends for about 30 miles west of the Jharia field. At Bermo, on this only partially-developed field, the Bengal-Nagpur Railway and the East Indian Railway jointly own one of the largest coal quarries in the world, whilst on the Kargali seam with an approximate depth

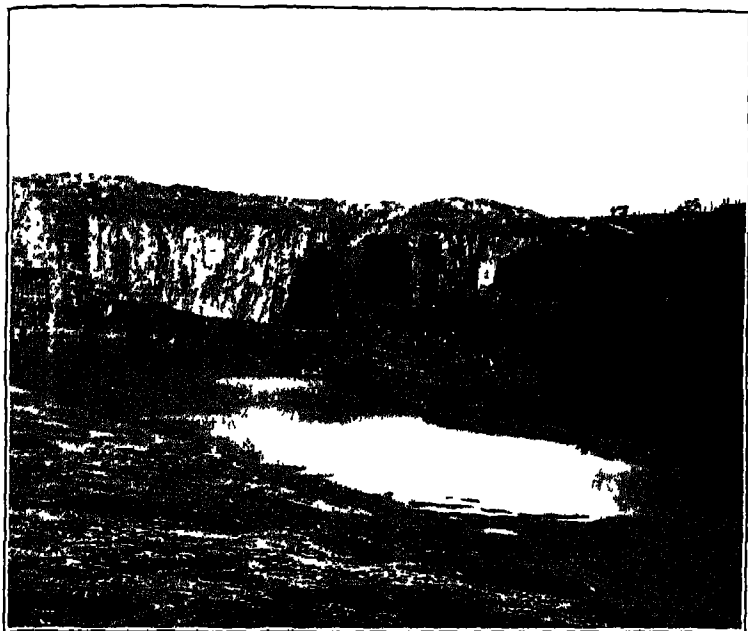
THE WHEELS OF IND

of 40 ft. the Great Indian Peninsula Railway Company operate another. The removal of an absurdly few feet of top subsoil at the Bermo Quarry discloses a seam, with a maximum thickness of 90 ft., nine-tenths of which is first-class locomotive coal. Open to the sky, no underground costs, no haulage from dark to light, little in the way of maintenance, this quarrying of coal is the last word in simplicity. 1,025,000 tons were raised in 1931-2 from No. 1 Quarry alone. Quarry No. 2 also sent forth its quota of 820,000 tons during the same period, to be hauled far away to raise and keep steam in the speeding express locomotives and powerful freight engines racing and hauling along over 7,000 route miles of iron track.

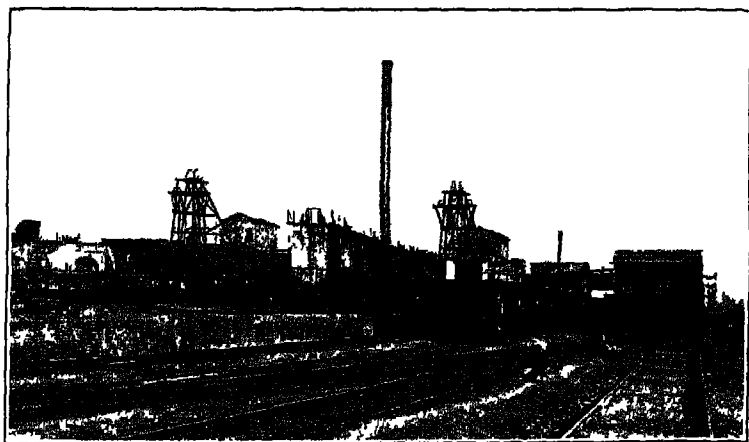
Stand on the edge of the giant No. 1 Quarry and gaze down sheer into its coaly depths, bathed in brilliant noon-day glare. See the 4,000 coolies, far below, like wee ants winning in the sunshine of to-day the stored sunlight which fell to earth in the morning of time. Men, women and children, families together, laughing and shouting in the great hole, getting coal from the ground in the easiest fashion known. Equipped only with hammers and large chisels, they simply split the solid ground of coal beneath them, or the rock-like walls around, into handy sizeable lumps and heave it into small tubs or corves, which are hauled up an inclined way to the tumbler tips which gape over the waiting empty wagons. The whole thing to new eyes looks fantastic, as if it were part of a gigantic game.

Little toddlers of five or six years clasp chunks of black coal to their naked black tummies and in earnest playfulness waddle towards the *decauville* track which spiderwebs the dusty, ebony floor.

Interested, I asked the Manager his all-in costs per ton. Roughly four shillings, he replied, adding that



THE GIANT COAL QUARRY AT BERMO
with its ninety-feet walls of solid coal



MALKERA COLLIERY.
A modern undertaking on the Jharia Coalfield

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

when these quarries petered out in the fullness of years, the railway company had another block marked out at Kedla in the West Bokaro field with an estimated reserve of 16 million tons lying just a few feet under the surface. These potential fields, ripe for development, extend for miles. After the Bokaro comes the Karanpura field, with an extent of about 40 miles and a maximum width of approximately 25 miles, and so on.

When I once mentioned this El Dorado of Old King Cole to the Chief Salesman of a large English Colliery Company, worried by constricting markets and piling costs, he turned his face to the office wall and wept.

The Indian railroads have much more extensive powers regarding ancillary undertakings than their English counterparts. Hence their engaging in coal mining, although it should be stated that they consume the entire output themselves and do not enter into competition with those commercial firms engaged solely in the winning and marketing of fuel. Doubtless, however, the latter feel rather aggrieved at being deprived of what might, under more propitious circumstances, have been looked upon as their best market.

Familiar as I had been with the traffic movements of the North of England coalfields, one thing at Bhojudih early puzzled me. Where were those long trains of pit timber, so common a sight on their way from the North-East Coast ports to the inland collieries? Shoring timber and pit props on the Jharia field were not a common sight. I was given to understand, and subsequent descents into the mines confirmed, that there was little need for much timber. The coal beds lie for the most part between sheets of rock, substantial and solid. Even the shafts are not lined either with brick or wood, the hard rock forming the sides simply being dressed as the sinking proceeds.

THE WHEELS OF IND

If Nature has been generous in providing the Bengal-Nagpur and other Indian Railways with an almost unlimited supply of cheap coal and has so helped to keep down their operating costs, it has also, by obviating the need for much timber support, deprived the same lines of revenue which might otherwise have come to them.

It is too much to expect, however, in this world to get your bread buttered on both sides.



The marshalling yard at Bhojudih cut through the settlement. On the North were the lines of bungalows for the traffic and locomotive officials and the quarters of the menial staff. On the South side, in solitary grandeur, stood the bungalow of the only officer in the place, and I was the occupier.

I soon got myself dug in. I was fortunate in possessing a Chief Station Master and Controller who was keen, enthusiastic and competent, and he and I soon understood each other. I pursued the same policy with the staff that I had adopted on the Bilaspur district and found as before it was successful. I appreciated the importance of every cog, however small it might be, in the great machine of transport and endeavoured to understand as far as I could the point of view of the humblest member of my staff. I tried to make them realize that I wished to be looked upon as one of themselves, concerned in the smooth working of the wheels we all served, and not as one many degrees removed in a halo of officialdom, who dropped upon them with both feet when things went wrong or frigidly approved when matters progressed satisfactorily. I sometimes thought that many otherwise excellent junior officers failed to get the best from their subordinate staffs by

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

their real or assumed air of aloofness, and their unwillingness to descend at times to fraternity with their lesser brethren in the game of transport. Perhaps the military spirit, excellent and necessary in its proper sphere, permeates too much the other Indian services. Perhaps my method was wise, or maybe I was just fortunate, but in any case, during my service in the Coalfield area, notoriously a difficult one to handle, everything went swimmingly, and we managed to keep things moving and prevented that much-cursed bottleneck from getting choked.

That nightmare of traffic officers, the Engineering Department, was at the time busy pulling up Bhojudih Yard at various points and laying fresh track with the regularity of a mechanical hen. They cast eyes upon and gangs of coolies into, Mohuda Yard, another important coal centre, and started their little game there. They pushed up new stations with surprising agility, altering here and constructing there with their usual air of efficiency and contempt for the poor harassed traffic-wallahs, leaving us to work the train service as best we could. Everything was in a state of flux. Transport, the handmaiden of Industry, zealously waited upon her mistress and endeavoured to anticipate her next requirement. It was all very interesting, however, and first-class training.

Wandering round my little domain, I met many faces familiar to me. Thrown out by the whirlpool of fate and dissatisfied Traffic Superintendents from more salubrious districts, they had been deposited castaway on the barren strand of Bhojudih to await eventual rescue by the good ship 'Transfer.' The majority seemed to realize this was their last hope and strenuously strove to make good again. One or two hardened spirits, with rascality too deeply ingrained to be

THE WHEELS OF IND

eradicated altogether, now and then deviated far from the straight path of rectitude ; and so, of course, had to go. The majority went lightheartedly enough, to live with their numerous relations, as is the custom, until fate smiled kindly again.

One or two stoutly rebelled against the order to depart and proved awkward.

One Station Master, noted for his asinine stupidity and general uselessness, refused to be sacked. He hung on to his post even when the new Station Master arrived and only made up his mind to quit when he found his salary had stopped arriving.

He thereupon proceeded to haunt me. Each morning when I left my bungalow to go to office he would secrete himself behind some telegraph post and rush out upon me like a highwayman. He would grovel in the dust, slaver all over my newly cleaned shoes and fairly turn himself into a worm, meanwhile howling to the sky for his job back. The whole thing sickened me. Civility I expected and usually got, but this abject servility got my goat. Eventually he sickened of me too and my continued refusals and ceased his dashes from the cover of the posts and wandered off to pastures new.

Another, unknown, under the shadow of anonymity, mailed me a threat, written in foul and filthy language, to the effect that I might expect a bullet at any moment ; whilst another, on the eve of his departure from amongst us, unwisely stated what he would do, or would like to do, to me for dispensing with his services, and was soundly hammered by one of my railway guards for his insolence. One morning I received a letter from one who sought another opening. He concluded his appeal by appending after his name the remarkable title, ' Applicant in Mournfulness.'

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

I am afraid my declinature would not add to his merriment.

On the whole, however, the staff from the lowest upwards were a cheerful lot, eager to please and anxious to learn and I met innumerable Indians with whom it was a pleasure to work. In a district where there was a good deal more work than play, they toiled, as is the custom on Indian Railways, seven days a week, although this lengthy spell may be shortened soon. In September, 1929, the Central Legislature received a bill making provision for a 60-hour week with 24 hours' consecutive rest in accordance with the Washington and Geneva Conventions, and the Indian Railways (Amendment) Act, 1930, continues the good work.



From Bhojudih the Coalfield main lines run round in a complete circle with Mohuda Junction at the opposite pole to Bhojudih. This circle is bisected by a short but important subsidiary line running from Jamadoba to Balliari near Parbad Station. From the apex of Mohuda runs the Grand Chord Line north-west to Gomoh to connect with the East Indian Railway, whilst south-west runs the Bokharo-Ramgarh extension to Bermo and its giant quarries. Encircling all this intensive Bengal-Nagpur system which connects with 144 collieries is the East Indian Railway track which likewise serves an important coal area.

There is little poetry about the Coalfield, unless its sombre desolation dominated by the dignity of industry can move the visitor to deeper thought. Gaunt pit head-gear straddling the skyline, waste heaps bare and bleak, brick buildings new and ugly, black dust-covered ground and a black dusty population.

Everywhere, in every direction, the wanderer comes

THE WHEELS OF IND

up against rail-road track, meandering about like a colossal centipede.

Yet there is romance and legend, too, amidst the dust and smoke. Nine miles from Bhojudih on the Grand Chord line we come to the little station of Talgaria. As the line approaches the platform it jerks sharply to the right to resume the straight again past the station. In the centre of the long stone platform is a large octagonal-shaped hole, carefully delineated and covered over with movable steel plates. A few stunted trees, obviously disgusted with themselves, cluster round the orifice and droop in the brassy sunlight. On certain days the centre plates are removed, exposing a hole only a few inches deep. Into this tomb-like vault the pious folk drop offerings of flowers together with their simple prayers. I was intrigued at the unusual sight of a shrine on a station platform and raised the usual query, obtaining my answer from the Engineer who constructed the line.

When the track was surveyed, little room was available for deviation. On the South the Damooda River definitely defined the limit. On the North an area of soil useless from a permanent-way point of view likewise hemmed in the proposed route. The few yards' width of remaining ground offered him 'Hobson's Choice.'

Contractors got going, gangs of coolies were collected and the work commenced. All went merrily to schedule until the iron way had progressed as far as the site of the present station of Talgaria. There a mysterious calamity befell the toiling gangs. Coolies sickened from some uncanny, unknown malady whilst those who braved it a little longer bled from the nose and ears as they worked.

Finally, even the remnants of the swarming navvies



A SHRINE ON A RAILWAY
The *suttee* site on Talgara Canton Platform

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

refused to lift a finger and the job stopped. Threats, bribes, promises were of no avail. Here was something they could not understand and the frightened folk shrank away under the fear of the unknown. The contractors admitted their helplessness with their labour and left the baffled, harassed Engineer at his wits' end.

One morning, a wandering holy man came to his camp. He sought the sahib and informed him he was desecrating holy ground with his iron way which was doomed to disaster.

"Sahib, you'll never put a line through that ground ahead. It is a *suttee* site and is sacred with the blood of many Hindu widows burnt there in the olden time."

The Engineer knew of *suttee*, of course, that act of self-immolation practised voluntarily (and on occasions compulsorily) by Hindu women on the burning pyres of their dead husbands. This barbarous idea has been officially suppressed for many years, although even to-day, at times, some Indian woman, newly widowed, will revert to the custom of her sisters of long ago and pouring petrol over herself will strike a match and perish in the resulting inferno.

The Engineer had been too long in the country not to respect its many strange beliefs and oft-times inexplicable happenings, or to pour the sceptical contempt of Western ignorance upon the mystic knowledge of the East.

He asked the old man's advice, unlearned and unlettered as he was, and what is more, he took it. He diverted his proposed line from the straight in a detour round the hallowed spot, resuming his alignment farther on. He fixed the site of the *suttee* pyres and walled it round to protect its sacred earth from the tread of alien feet and built his platform round it. As soon as he detailed to the old fellow his proposals, things seemed

THE WHEELS OF IND

to freshen and brighten up. The coolies quickly recovered their normal health and spirits and returned to their task with vigour. The line took a leap to the right, past the fatal spot, then a leap back to the straight again and on to the eastern bank of the Damooda River which now cut clean across the way and required bridging.

The mighty waste of river and sand was a formidable obstacle but not more so than many others he had conquered. He reckoned without the unknown, however. Try as he would he could not get a foundation for his centre pier. Shifting sand and unexpected out-of-season spate of floods mocked his fruitless endeavours. In perplexity, he sent for the local historian and the old man came again.

He easily solved the riddle and with his usual simplicity outlined the cure.

"Sahib, many holy men lie buried on the banks of this water. They resent your seeking to disturb their sleep."

"I appreciate all you say," replied the builder of bridges, "but if I don't span this river, I won't get any sleep at all."

"Sahib, if you are determined, you must propitiate the dead."

"How?"

"Try again. You will find rock. Build up your masonry to water level; place a layer of silver on the pile, and build on. The bridge will stand and the holy ones sleep."

Strange as it may sound, he complied with the old man's extraordinary request.

He found rock, built up to flood level, placed silver rupees edge to edge on the top of the masonry and carried on. To-day the heavy freight trains rattle over

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

the silver pier and their rumbling shakes not the pious ones who sleep in the sands below.

Similar grim barriers of the occult standing indefinitely but definitely against sacrilegious materialism, have been reported in connection with the excavation of the new naval base at Singapore in 1932. A sacred tree was in the way and despite opposition from the resident Malays it was ruthlessly uprooted. Almost immediately an unexpected and virulent outbreak of malaria swept over the coolies and swift death visited many of the white officials.



There was the fruitful beginning of a legend at Jamuniataund five miles from Mohuda on the road to Bermo. The Assistant Engineer resided there, and when occasion offered I would stay overnight at his place. We were often mutually glad of each other's company. His *chowkidar*, or watchman, immediately used to go to sleep as soon as he came on duty and my friend thought it was time the old fellow was jerked up. We peered into the verandah one night and there was the old chap in an arm-chair, dead to the world.

We each put a sheet over our head, tiptoed outside and with fiendish cries upset the chair and the *chowkidar*. He gathered himself up and gazed round.

As his sleep-fuddled eyes lit on the white-shrouded figures, he lit out of the verandah like a rocket and yelled at the top of his voice. Next morning he appeared, muttering about *shaitans* and ghosts and gave in his notice, alleging that he was too old now for the responsible post of watching the bungalow of his Honour.

The next time I went there his son had been duly installed in his stead and like the proverbial new broom, he was, if only till the newfangledness got worn off,

THE WHEELS OF IND

really watching. Maybe the old man's story, much magnified, of the luminous shrieking devils, kept him alert and awake. At any rate, every hour or so he wakened the still night and those sleeping inside the bungalow, with a loud-voiced recital of cold-blooded horror to the listening or unlistening world around, with horrible threats of further horrors to come upon those rash enough to loiter near the bungalow after night-fall. He concluded his ghoulish orgy by a brief résumé of the previously detailed punishments.

"Hear you, robbers, thieves, *dacoits* and bad men! Many devils live here! My sahib is a railway sahib and if he catches you around he will put you on the railway line and have your heads cut off!"

My friend thought this midnight serenading a great joke.

Personally after being wakened up several times by these yards of balderdash being hurled at the night, I thought it a confounded nuisance.

Whether the future will develop a haunted bungalow, or the legend of a long-gone sahib, with a propensity like the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland* for cutting off heads, posterity alone will determine.



The district being so small, I soon got over it again and again. Before long I knew everyone and everyone knew me.

Each day the routine was almost the same. Rising early in the morning, office, tennis, dinner, bed, a monotonous round which needed watching. Christmas time came again and as Chairman of the Festivities Committee I had ample opportunity of seeing how nobly and right well the festive time was kept in Bhojudih. There was no lack of rupees. Practically all

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

the colliery concerns sent very generous contributions and possibly the youngsters of Bhojudih got more tangible evidence of the visit of Santa Claus than any others on the system. The older folk, too, having jurisdiction over the spending, did not forget themselves. Moonlight picnics took place on the sandy shore of the river, with a guard's van and locomotive pressed into service to run out the consumables and the festive consumers. Where is the fun of walking and carrying food, solid and liquid, with sixty high-powered locomotives and drivers to match, hanging about the place? Besides, it was Christmas and the administration has never frowned upon the innocent diversions of its subordinate staff. Tennis drives, dances, children's parties and, on the magic night, a huge pole disguised as a fir, with imitation leaves and festoons of toys and lights, to gladden the hearts and sparkle the wondering eyes of the little ones! And the great Panjandrum himself in cotton-wool whiskers that tickled and smothered, ladling out the good things from the wonderful tree, whilst each little face, brown or white, shone with anticipation and each pair of dark eyes danced with delight!

On that merry Christmas Eve only one incident occurred that had not been rehearsed or expected. About midnight an Anglo-Indian Guard, roused to some forgotten vengeance by an excess of festive spirit, from a bottle, dashed into the Railway Institute in the middle of the dancing. Armed with a loaded shotgun, his blood-shot eyes swept round the little room looking for his enemy, either real or imagined. In his condition he was quite capable of manufacturing a victim on the spot, just to avoid spoiling the sensation he had undoubtedly created. Fortunately, a few tactful words divorced him from his murderous weapon, which we dreaded might go off at any moment, and

THE WHEELS OF IND

thus rendered harmless and merely silly, he was taken away and put to bed, to awaken the next day with little recollection of his drunken bravado.

When the interrupted dance ended in the small wee hours, I set off on my lone journey home. My 'boy' had been sent away to bed many hours before. The oil hurricane lamp I carried swung violently to and fro as I hurried along, anxious for sleep. Pale gleams of fitful light and alternate shadow zigzagged on the ground before me.

Suddenly I stopped dead in my track. Between my outstretched feet I glimpsed the white belly of a *krait* as the light fell upon it. It slithered away unconcernedly between my shoes and passed on into the darkness whence it came. I had no cane with me so could not kill this wandering few inches of cold clamminess, whose bite represents a brief hour or so between life and eternity. With an involuntary shiver I resumed my way, less hurried and more wary. My temporary slumber must be postponed awhile, lest I should in my eagerness unwittingly enter upon a permanent sleep. Taking things all round I really couldn't complain of the night being without incident.

Christmas Day !

I rolled out of bed, had a bath, *chota hazri* and then a bright idea. I would have Christmas pudding that day, if humanly possible. It was no good endeavouring to talk to my 'boy' about it for the simple reason I knew very little about its mysteries myself. Of course I knew good housewives at Home had made this bringer of Christmas joy and indigestion many moons before, but I dismissed that as a small matter.

This was India and things worked differently. I therefore hopefully hastened through the riotous sunlight, which had nothing Christmassy about it, to see

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

the *babu* in charge of the Railway Refreshment Room. The Catering Department of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, at many outlandish spots far removed from the main founts of supply, puts down depots of provisions of all kinds with an obliging *babu* who officiates as the High Priest of this Temple erected to the worship of the inner man. Here the sojourner, weary of local 'tack,' can vary life a little by procuring necessities and luxuries, tinned edibles and bottled vigour.

Another delightful idea, too ! You needn't pay for them ! Simply sign a chit and dismiss the mercenary matter from your mind until your salary cheque arrives from H.Q., sadly battered and shrunk, with your little notes pinned to it to give it moral support and arithmetical evidence in case you refuse to believe it yours. Instead of receiving the blow a tap at a time, you get it all in one fell swoop. India lives on chits. Convenient, of course, very much so, but often disastrous. Like Noah sending out his dove, one scatters these little white messengers over the face of the land. Like Noah's dove, they all come winging home again. With this difference : Noah's bird brought him good news.

I entered the store. Inside were rows and rows of foodstuffs, bottled and canned. Inside too, sitting at a table with emptied evidence around him, sat my Yardmaster, also 'canned.' The morning being what it was, perhaps his lapse was excusable. He hailed me familiarly, very familiarly as a matter of fact. However, it was the season of goodwill and I heartily returned his hilarious salutation. He was most insistent I should have a whiskey with him and my refusal rather huffed him. I simply refused, however, because I never drank spirits during my stay in India. I am aware it is rather unusual, but I never felt the need for stimu-

THE WHEELS OF IND

lants. I might have been better with it. I cannot say. I was, however, certainly all right without it. I agreed a compromise on iced beer and so somewhat mollified my convivial official.

"*Babu*," I said to the manager, "have you any Christmas puddings?"

His face took on a look like a refreshment-room price-list, but his eyes betokened no sign of remembrance.

"Plum pudding?" I hazarded again, remembering another title.

His smiling face assumed the expression of a cash register recording another sale.

"Plum pudding, sir! Oh, yes."

He dived into his sanctum sanctorum and presently returned with a round tin, covered with the dust of ages. If that tin contains Christmas pudding, thought I, it must be a portion of the one Bob Cratchit boiled in the wash-house copper. He removed the dust and I deciphered the legend, emblazoned on the outside of the tinny tomb. It was plum pudding all right, so it read, and whilst you cannot always tell a pudding by the cloth in which it is boiled, surely a leading English firm would not wilfully disguise nor flagrantly misname its products.

Arriving home I called for the 'boy' and after carefully reading over to him the explicit directions regarding treatment, handed over the treasure to be prepared for dinner.

That night after my bath, I sat down to dine. I might be alone, 7,000 miles from the log fires and sparkling frost of an English Christmas night, but I was going to have the traditional fare. I was not symbolically arrayed in full evening kit with boiled shirt or any of that rot so beloved of fiction writers depicting lonely Britishers in alien lands; but in com-

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

fortable *négligé*. Pyjama trousers and a shirt to be exact.

The great moment arrived.

The 'boy' brought in a flaming, blue, lurid mass and planked it down on the table before me.

"What's that, boy?"

"Pudding, Sahib, and ess-auce."

I gazed astounded at the pallid glutinous mess with disgust and disappointment. It looked like an inverted white pie-dish in colour and appearance and, for aught I knew, in texture as well. Mystified I stuck a spoon into this Christmas libel and probed into its interior. It must indeed, I surmised, be a piece of Bob Cratchit's pudding gone white with age.

A juicy, yellowish, jam-like mass filled the suety shell.

"Boy, bring me that tin!"

He brought the metal coffin of the ancient and the washed-out name-plate which had boiled off. I carefully scrutinized the inscription again.

'*Plum pudding*,' sure enough.

What cannot speak cannot lie.

It *was* plum pudding—*Victoria*!



The Indian staff too have their festive moments and most wholeheartedly celebrate their many religious festivals. The month of October is a very busy time with the Hindu flock, and during this period, whilst at Bhojudih, I received many strawberry-coloured invitation cards requesting my presence to witness the '*Kali Puja Jatra and Nautch*' at various collieries and stations. One such invitation bore the delightful, old-world message, 'to commence at candle-light.' At many of these *pujas*, in addition to the dancing of imported *nautch* girls, plays are performed. The plots of these

THE WHEELS OF IND

are usually drawn from the seemingly inexhaustible quarry of the Hindu mythology, although the more ambitious amateurs occasionally turn to stronger stuff. To see *Hamlet* performed in Hindustani with a typically Oriental setting and cast is to see comic opera left standing. These mythological operas, somewhat after the fashion of the mediæval English mystery plays, last for hours. They usually commence at 8.30 p.m. When they finish, I know not. I never sat one through. After four or five hours I paid my respects to the leading light and blew out. To sit hour after hour, watching meaningless vapourings in a tongue which was unintelligible to me owing to the vast interlarding of mythological reference and long-dead words, was somewhat of an ordeal. Lifeless posturings, the shrill falsetto of the boys playing female parts, the entire absence of scenery and the continued sequence of apparent nothing left gaps which the imagination refused to fill.

One play named *Narakasur*, part of which I witnessed, contains nearly forty principal characters in addition to a mighty attendant chorus. No doubt its five acts and thirty-six scenes have been designed to give each player a chance to strut his little stage awhile and mouth his well-conned piece. Perhaps, too, its length accounted for the fact that when I left about midnight things appeared to be just getting into their stride.

Candidly, so far as I was concerned, doubtless owing to my ignorance, it is almost impossible adequately to describe the depths of boredom to which these religious operas descend. The Indians, however, most certainly seem to rejoice greatly in this local portrayal of their ancient mythological tales, despite the fact that many of the audience were as blank regarding what it was all about as I was.

Of all the most boring forms of time-dissipation I

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

can heartily commend a display of native dancing. The professional dancing or *nautch* girl, who sometimes carries thousands of rupees in value on her body, in the shape of armlets, necklets, anklets, ear-rings, nose- and toe-rings, powders her face with yellow turmeric, blackens her eyes with cosmetics and uses rouge and paint on occasion like her lighter-skinned sister of the West. Thus adorned she stands on almost one and the same spot, shuffles her feet and flaps her hands with elephantine gracefulness. Bearing in mind the weight of solid metal which she carries, it is difficult for her to do anything else. Whilst she postures at the speed of a slow-motion film, what time and rhythm there may be is mercilessly banged out by the tom-tom orchestra, whose quota of cacophonous din is materially helped by the shrill screeching of their fellow-desperadoes, the one-string-fiddle merchants. I always got the impression that the musicians, in addition to getting the front seats, got all the kick out of the show.



Three miles from Bhojudih lay Bhaga, the 'Coalopolis' of the Jharia field. Here, in one of the finest clubs in the province, the coal-*wallahs* congregated together to discuss the known intricacies of coal-raising and the baffling mysteries of persistent price-dropping.

There was a dance at the Club one night and the festivities were at their height when a *chowkidar* dashed in, looking for his sahib. Devils and spirits had been at work, he declared, and practically all that remained of his sahib's bungalow were the bare walls.

Out we streamed into the night to presently arrive at the looted residence. The *dacoits* had done their work thoroughly. Curtains and hangings had been stripped from doors and walls, pictures and small furni-

THE WHEELS OF IND

ture had disappeared, whilst, needless to remark, all valuables had been spirited away. Whilst the watchmen stoutly slept, guarding their charge in the time-honoured way, a gang of thieves had descended like locusts upon the bungalow and cleaned up all the contents as they swept through. The young *mem-sahib*, newly married and just out from England, silently wept as she thought of her treasured possessions, the parting nuptial gifts of gold and silver and the little concrete reminders of Home. Her husband fell upon the erstwhile slumbering guardians and smote them hip and thigh whilst we others rummaged around and retrieved several small articles which the marauders had dropped in their haste.

A few nights afterwards I was sitting at my desk in the bungalow. The servants had said their *salaams* and retired for the night and I worked alone. Suddenly I sensed an unseen presence and swung round in my chair. Framed in the open doorway, the black night behind him, stood a tall Punjabi. His hawk-like eyes roved round the room, to rest on mine when I spoke.

“What do you want?”

“Food, Sahib.”

The hour was not propitious and I liked not his lean look and hungry stare. He appeared to me like the messenger of Moses, come to spy out the land; so I bade him depart. He went as silently as he had come, but did not leave the place as he had found it, for I was filled with a grave disquiet. I remembered the Bhaga looting and whilst my bungalow harboured little of value, what I had was mine and I wished to keep it. In any case I was not looking for trouble if it could be avoided. I made the round of the bungalow and saw all doors were securely fastened. On account

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

of the heat it was not desirable to close the windows, particularly on mere suspicion. In any case each window was covered with a strong protective mesh of expanded metal and I felt little uneasiness as to them. After a while, things still seeming normal, I thought that perhaps I was getting prematurely scared, so creeping under the mosquito netting I fell asleep.

What was the noise that had wakened me?

I looked at my luminous watch-face. Three o'clock in the morning. Mere fancy! The wail of a wandering bat or the muffled roll of a passing coal-train.

Nonsense; it was there again! A low harsh grating sound: the rasp of a file on metal.

Was I scared? Of course I was. I was up against an unknown quantity and being entirely alone I had to handle the job myself.

The lads outside appeared to be endeavouring to pay me an uninvited visit in the night. I decided to meet them in the same dark covering, also unexpected.

I slid out of bed and peeping round the doorway leading from the bedroom into the dining-room, intently listened. The file still softly grated on the window guard. I went back into the bedroom and felt for my 12-bore and slipped in a charge of No. 4 shot. Tiptoeing back to the dining-room doorway I peered again through the gloom. Faintly silhouetted against the paly dark, I glimpsed dim shapes.

I yelled a brief warning and let them have both barrels slap through the grating. I heard a hurried scramble and the sound of hastening feet.

The interview was over.

Next morning little was to be seen save a lead-spattered wall and the partly file-bitten window-cover.



THE WHEELS OF IND

In addition to the meagre local stock, much labour is recruited from other parts of India for hundreds of miles around. Bulky Bengalis, dark Bilaspuris, tall Punjabis, gaunt Pathans, sleek Madrassis and jungly Santals with their steel head-bands were but some of the cosmopolitan crowd that delved and dug in the Jharia field.

In the monsoons, when diminished output and curtailed production threw many out of work, some returned home for a brief spell or sojourned in peaceful idleness. The restless spirits of the northerners, however, rebelled against inactivity and they roamed around in bands, ripe for any mischief. They presented rather a problem even to the railway administration. The local lads were nimble-fingered enough without the support of the more virile robbers from the North.

From the Bhojudih Yard alone I estimated I was losing nearly 100 tons of coal per week.

Here the 1,600-ton coal trains were marshalled for delivery to the great works of the Tata Iron Company at Jamshedpur, 156 miles west of Calcutta. This huge hive of industry requires nearly 2,000,000 tons of coal annually to feed its five blast furnaces and mills through the medium of 200 coke ovens, so that it may be enabled to excel its 1932 record of supplying 62 per cent of India's total demand for steel. When the improvements at present under review are completed the plant will have an annual output of 1,000,000 tons of pig-iron and 650,000 tons of finished steel.

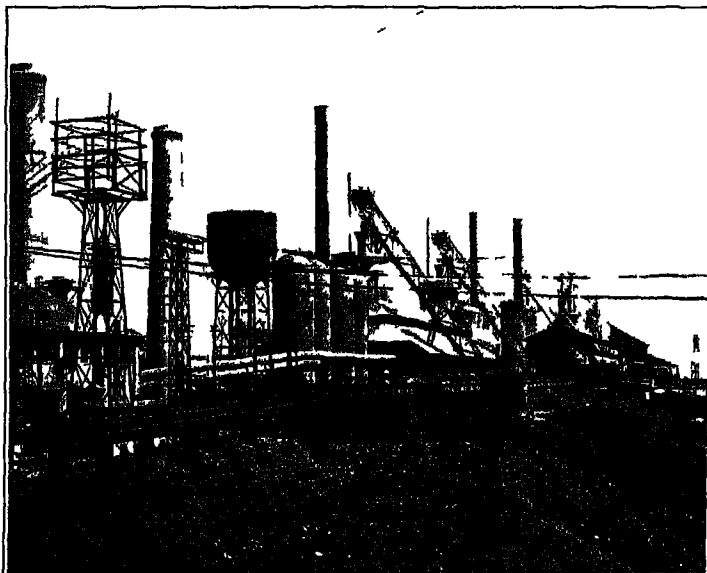
Small wonder, then, that the go-ahead Bengal-Nagpur Railway has doubled much of its track from the coal-fields to this city of steel, with 25,000 folk on its payroll, and sought the latest in motive power to haul the giant coal trains. The long open wagons of black diamonds roar along behind articulated 'Beyer-Garratt'



By courtesy, Messrs Tata & Co. Ltd

THE GORUMAHISANI IRON MINE

Groups of workers, both male and female busy on the thirty-feet face of float ore



By courtesy, Messrs Tata & Co., Ltd

PART OF THE BLAST FURNACE PLANT AT THE JAMSHEDPUR WORKS
OF THE TATA IRON & STEEL CO., LTD

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

monster freight engines which habitually haul 2,000-ton trains and on occasion have drawn a load of 2,374 tons. Twenty-eight of these magnificent freight locomotives are in service on various parts of the Bengal-Nagpur system and the good work of progress, typical of the India of to-day, still goes on.

As the long trains of 24-ton and 44-ton capacity coal wagons, small when compared with the Bengal-Nagpur 90-ton capacity iron-ore wagons, but comparing very favourably with the standard 12-ton mineral wagon of England, steamed slowly away up the heavy grade leading from the Bhojudih Yard, coolies who had previously secreted themselves on the top of the coal in the wagons would rise to frenzied action and throw off the coal as fast as they could to their waiting compatriots by the side of the track who promptly gathered up the spoil and took it away for sale in the bazaars. As the train gathered speed for its long journey to one of the many iron-works, the ride-stealers and coal-thieves descended from the wagons and decamped in the gathering dusk. It was this persistent and consistent loss of coal, to say nothing of other traffics, which prompted Headquarters, in answer to urgent appeals, to send me down a squad of Ghurkas.

One morning the Chief Clerk announced :

"Sir, Ghurka *chowkidars* come."

As I stepped outside eight pairs of heels clicked together and eight brown arms came smartly to the salute. Spick and span they looked in their khaki. Bright-eyed and alert, they stood to attention whilst the oldest, in charge, received his instructions. Each man had been to France and possessed his Army pay-book and record and an imposing bar of ribbons.

I explained what was required and could see from the sparkle in their eyes they were looking forward to

THE WHEELS OF IND

a good time. When I finished the old man propounded two questions and I knew from the effect of my definite refusal on his pals that he was speaking for them all.

"Can we use our *kukris*, Sahib?"

"You cannot."

"Can we *maro* (beat) them?"

"You must not. Any thief you catch must be held in custody until the Police arrive. On no account must anyone be hurt by you."

They seemed rather downcast by this order, but saluted smartly and dispersed.

They were quartered in my compound buildings as I had plenty of spare room and during the remainder of my sojourn in Bhojudih, with these little fire-eaters living on my doorstep, I was not again troubled with midnight marauders.

They settled into their new life and work with the accomplished ease of experienced campaigners. Troubled with no idiosyncrasies of caste or even religion at all, aliens like myself amidst foreign folk, they kept themselves to themselves and fraternized little with those around, whilst their fame spread daily abroad amidst the law-breakers of the district. They gave curt civility to the local population and scant respect to even high-caste Brahmins, no doubt much to the annoyance of the latter, and took orders and brooked interference from no one but myself.

When the mantle of the night fell upon the Bhojudih Yard and all honest men were asleep, or supposed to be, they ceaselessly patrolled the area, awake and alert, simply thirsting for wrong-doers to come their way.

As a matter of fact they were the very antithesis of all that has been held sacred for ages amongst Indian watchmen.

I have rolled up to my bungalow at all hours of the

BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

night and early morning, after being out on the district, and always found the Ghurka on bungalow duty wide awake and zealously guarding the place. If he had been an Indian watchman my first job on arriving home would have been to rouse him to activity. Often during the night I have been awakened from a light sleep by the crunch, crunch, of his army-pattern boots on the path outside or his swift "Haloogoes there" as his sharp eyes picked out some belated wanderer or his quick ears heard something suspicious.

Weekly they held a semi-military parade in my compound after which they spent happy hours in cleaning mirror-bright their beloved *kukris* and keeping a razor-like edge on the giant knives. After this operation they nicked their wrists till blood appeared and, apparently satisfied, sheathed their fearsome weapons. I understood that this solemn rite was in deference to an age-long command that a *kukri* once drawn must not be sheathed till it has drawn blood. I was also assured that the owner infinitely preferred shedding other people's blood rather than his own.

One morning the Chief Station Master at Bhojudih rang me up :

"Will you come across to the station, sir? Your Ghurkas have got a fellow crucified on an iron bar, and when I told them to release him they said they only take orders from you."

Arriving at the station, I found a poor miserable wretch fastened to a wagon draw-bar hook. He had lain in the sun since dawn and was obviously about 'all in.'

I ordered the Ghurkas to unfasten him.

"Sahib, he'll escape!"

"Not he!" I replied, "the poor devil won't be able to stand!"

THE WHEELS OF IND

They unbound the ropes and the pinioned one promptly collapsed. It appeared the bloodhounds had discovered this unfortunate engaged in the amazing job of taking out the draw-bar hook from a wagon in order, as he afterwards alleged, to make an axle for a cart. This is about the coolest piece of lifting I have known.

The body-snatchers promptly proceeded to tie the luckless youth, none too gently, I am afraid, to the evidence and then had carried thief and theft to the station and dumped them on the platform to await my inspection.

On another occasion the Assistant Engineer in charge of the remodelling operations in the Bhojudih Yard arrived from his Headquarters station to find all work at a standstill.

He blew into my office :

" Mitchell, do you want this job finished ? "

" Of course, I'm sick of seeing you Engineering folk around, upsetting everything. Why ? "

" Then tell your *Ghurka-wallahs* to give my coolies their earth-baskets back again. They've impounded the lot and the coolies say ' no baskets, no work. ' "

I sent for the chief watchman and asked why the baskets had been taken away. He alleged the coolies were loading stolen coal into them and to stop the thieving he had seized the receptacles.

The Engineer opined that even if his coolies had been stealing coal, he couldn't have his earth-works held up, which of course is an Engineer's view every time.

Much to the disgust of the old *Ghurka*, and I have no doubt to the delight of the coolies, I was compelled to release the baskets and instruct the watchmen to leave the coolies alone.

As time wore on, my *Ghurkas* from being merely

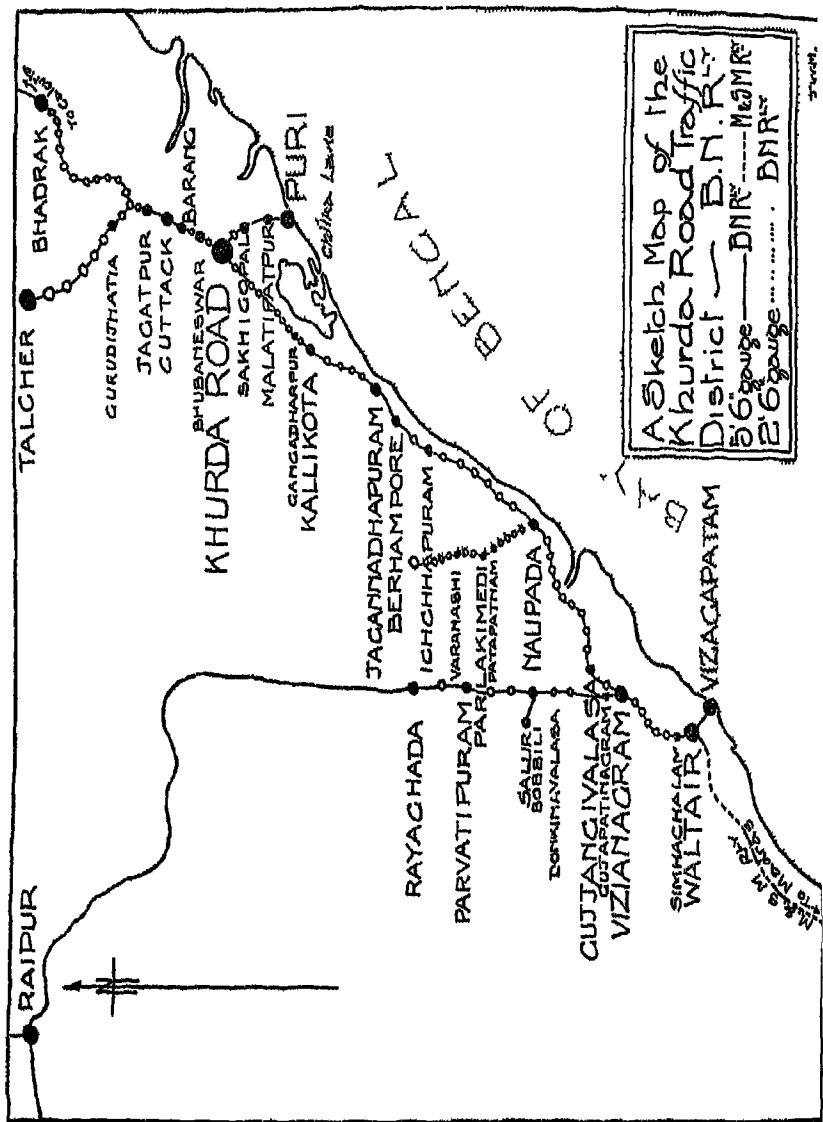
BLACK DIAMONDS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS

respected began to be feared. Their zeal outran their discretion. One or two hospital-case victims of their idea of a little horse-play did little to endear them to the other staffs. But they stopped almost all thieving. They also stopped an innocent fitter *en route* to the engine shed on night duty and, despite his protestations, accused him of being on the railway track for the purpose of theft and soundly hammered him in support of their convictions. By so doing they drew upon themselves and upon me the wrath of the Locomotive Department.

I soundly rated the whole bunch for their drastic methods and ideas of man-handling, despite my definite orders to the contrary, and told them they would have to ease up a little on the physical side if they wished to remain. We had already, I pointed out, got the Engineering Department's back up and now we had roused the ire of the Locomotive folk. If things continued in their present strain we looked like being ostracized. Thereafter for a time, like well-trained children, they were models of circumspection and discretion. It is difficult, however, for the leopard to change his spots. When I left Bhojudih the lads from the hills appeared to be getting restless once more and fed up with merely playing at being watchmen, and I am afraid they were destined to fall into hot water again.

Upon the day of my departure from the Coalfield for the East Coast section the station platform at Bhojudih was filled with representatives of the various railway departments who had come to bid me good-bye. As the train steamed away the lithe little bodies of my Ghurkas snapped to attention and the old man's voice rang loud above the rest :

“*Salaam, Sahib !*”



CHAPTER VII

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

FROM Khargpur the Bengal-Nagpur Railway sweeps southward to Waltair where it connects with the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway whose ribbons of steel roll on to link up with the South Indian line which carries the traveller onward through Dhanushkodi and Tuticorin to the island of Ceylon.

When I received orders to proceed to Khurda Road, 210 miles south of Khargpur, I tarried not in the going.

I had been the previous year on special duty in connection with the great Rath Jatra Festival of Jagannath at Puri and I looked forward to my longer stay with delighted anticipation.

It was dark when the Madras mail left Khargpur and I was soon asleep, to awaken with the dawn. The train was smoothly pushing its way through a new land : the country of the Ooriyas, a very dark-skinned folk, remnants of the aboriginal peoples of India. The countryside, pale and softened in the day's new light, was a dream. After the burnt, baked, stark sterility of the coalfields, the scenes from the carriage window were a delight to the eye, and restful to senses which had been frayed to shreds by an unvarying, weary monotone of dry bare earth and treeless wastes. It was as though some magic change had wrought its spell and as I slept had transported me to scenes and pastures new.

This was a different India from the one I had just

THE WHEELS OF IND

left a few short hours past. Yet my luggage still littered up the compartment floor just as I had placed it, and even if one may reasonably expect some obliging genie to girdle space with one in a moment or two it is hardly to be expected he would hamper his movements with two or three trunks. Still uncertain and puzzled I open the carriage door as the train pulls up at a busy wayside station. Whiff! come the aromas of Hind and I know definitely I am still in the land of smells.

Disillusioned, but by no means disappointed, I feast my eyes on the ever-changing panorama which unrolls before me. I realize this is but another trick of Mother India to intrigue her wandering children. Green waves of verdure roll all around, the spears of growing rice shine in the *bunded* fields where the lithe *ryots* are already busy at their early toil. Green-fronded fingers of palms sway in the morning breeze which blows from the nearby ocean, for the line hugs the coast for hundreds of miles.

To the West, in a haze of slaty grey, the peaks of the Eastern Ghauts rounded by distance hump their shoulders into the blue of the day. Despite the masses of green, the dominant colour is red. All around the outcrops of laterite impress their colour on the landscape. Red roads, red roofs, red robes.

We clatter across the bridges approaching Cuttack. These massive structures stand as a monument to Western engineering in general and the genius of the Bengal-Nagpur builders in particular. In the short space of 10 miles, between Jagatpur and Barang, the two stations adjacent to Cuttack, brains and brawn have thrown the iron way over the hot-weather wilderness of waste and sand and the monsoon madness of raging flood, no less than three times. Over the Kathjuri, the Khor-

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

kai and the mighty Mahanadi, weary with its wanderings from the far-away jungle wilds of the Central Provinces.

Through breaks in the greenery as we slide past, glimpses are caught of little temples, shyly peeping through the veil of morning, whilst now and then in the farther distance a larger pile pushes above the palms. Visible proof I am entering the land of temples. Not set up in prim perfection in solitary isolation but flung down with a prodigality which premises unplumbed depths of devotion and faith.

Look! we are rattling through a little station with a big name, Bhubaneswar, the village of a hundred shrines. Its quiet pride lies in its hundred temples, which cluster on an area of three square miles. True, to-day they lie, for the most part, desolate and deserted, but that does not detract from their concrete evidence of former greatness. A thousand years ago their courtyards echoed to the tread of happy worshippers, whilst the temple coffers bulged with pice from pious pilgrims. Legend states that originally no less than 7,000 shrines clustered around and about the sacred tank at Bhubaneswar. If this be true, perhaps their day drew nigh to setting through too intensive competition. All down this line they lie, landmarks of an ancient faith. The mighty monument of the Black Pagoda at Konarak, looking boldly out to sea, like a giant Struldbrug, lonely with the thoughts of a past long dead. The shrine of Simhachalam aloof at the head of eleven hundred steps, a humbler of the hilarious and a nightmare to the maimed. The path to Heaven is steep and high, but the descent therefrom, via the stairway rail, absurdly easy. Many mighty piles lie dead and silent, an empty mockery of departed glory, mere museums of amazing craftsmanship. Others faintly

THE WHEELS OF IND

breathe in the stifling atmosphere of modern worldliness, whilst many still boldly challenge the changing world and its ways. A few miles farther south the temple pile of 'The Lord Jagannath' at Puri hums with activity, its mighty being pulsating with vigour despite the beatings of its heart for a thousand years and more.

During this digression the flying miles have sped past, until I observe with startled surprise the outskirts of Khurda Road. The mail pulls up and I tumble out into the bright morning. Khurda Road at last.

This is the headquarters station of a traffic district stretching from Bhadrak in the North to the joint station of Waltair, 547 miles distant from Calcutta. Flung off at various points the branch lines from Khurda Road to Puri, Vizagapatam to Waltair, Cuttack to Talcher, Vizianagram to Parvatipuram and Rayaghada, and Bobbili to Salur complete the 550 miles of 5 ft. 6 in. gauge, with a narrow-gauge line from Naupada to Varanashi thrown in to make up a round 600. A fair good piece of line to look after, judged from a mileage standpoint. Formidable indeed when compared with the small compact Bhojudih area I had just left, but from an operating point of view not nearly so disturbing.

I delighted in Khurda Road and its environs. Its billows of greenery, the blue hills sleeping in the far distance and the luminous paling of the sky on the eastern horizon which betokened the near-by sea. Each night just after sunset, when the Western gates closed on the sun, the Eastern portals were blown open by a boisterous breeze from the billows which played over the heated land and peoples, cooling each to calm content.

I was rather surprised, therefore, when a friend of

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

mine, writing recently from Khurda Road, suggested the place was ill-named. In view of the heat, snakes and scorpions, he considered the spot would have been rightly called 'Murder Road.' I must agree that I, too, found it hot. Heat was everywhere, scorpions here and there, but snakes nowhere. I cannot share his caustic criticism of Khurda Road, however.

Talking of scorpions, those fierce little fellows that are like small black lobsters in appearance and young tanks in action, reminds me. It is said that if a scorpion be cornered and ringed round with fire, finding no way of escape, and gallantly scorning capture like a warrior of old, he commits self-destruction by stinging himself to death. I once had a Khurda Road scorpion so cornered, but then found I had no paraffin to make the fiery circle complete ; so as far as I am concerned the statement remains unproved.

The working of the district was very similar to that of most other main-line areas, and the methods adopted much the same. In addition to the usual passenger traffic, both local and through, there was a seasonal fruit rush, principally of mangoes for Calcutta and the North, which called for special attention and expeditious working. The cream of the traffic, however, was the pilgrim passengers who passed over the system in never-ending flow. Throughout the year they rolled on to Puri, to worship at the shrine of the 'Lord of the World,' or farther South to the mighty architectural marvels of Madura, Tanjore and Rameshwaram, to end in a giant spate of polyglot peoples at the great Rath Jatra of Jagannath.



Two miles to the east of Waltair was Vizagapatam, upon whose creeks the Bengal-Nagpur Railway Com-

THE WHEELS OF IND

pany, with characteristic energy and resolution, has brought within sight of completion the long-deferred hope of Central India for a port of its own.

Surveyed in 1924 and 1926, the new rail route has meant the building of 240 miles of track, from Raipur, on the main line from Calcutta to Nagpur, to connect up with Vizagapatam.

Traversing a giant triangle of approximately 125,000 square miles this new line opens a vast area hitherto almost isolated from the rest of the Peninsula. Peopled by shy jungle tribes and rich fauna, unknown to the tourist, visited only by a few Government officials, its immense potentialities, both agricultural and mineral, lie ripe for development.

Through deep tangled forests, blasting through solid rock to skirt wooded peaks, across the Mahanadi, Jonk, Tel and Nagavali Rivers and the deep gorge of Rayaguda, the indomitable engineers of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway blazed the trail.

Animated with the pioneer spirit of that grand old man of Indian Railways, Sir Trevredyn Rashleigh Wynne (the present Chairman of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway), they took the iron road through stretches of virgin country, hitherto supposed to be almost uninhabitable on account of malignant malaria, blackwater fever and cholera. Tenaciously and resolutely they fought their way and, thanks to the magnificent efforts of the Chief Medical Officer and his staff, won through with remarkably few casualties, whilst the Traffic Department followed behind and took up their permanent stations. Opened in 1932 this line shortens the rail route from the Central Provinces to the coast by 183 miles and opens up a new channel of communication for the cereals, minerals, nuts, timber, spices, hides, cotton and all the other products of Central India to

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

the definite loss of ports farther away, hitherto the only ones available.

Formerly for a distance of 1,000 miles, from Calcutta to Madras, no other major port existed on the East Coast of India and this huge hinterland lay starved for lack of economical transport facilities.

In August, 1933, the first phase of the great new harbour of Vizagapatam, won from rock and mud and sand, was completed with six berths ready to deal with ocean-going vessels. On Monday, December 18th, 1933, Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy of India, officially declared open this ambitious undertaking, the first major port to be entirely created by the enterprise of an Indian Railway. When the complete scheme reaches maturity fifty-four fully equipped berths will be available to deal with the growing tonnage to and from the lands behind and the deep-water ships that roam the seven seas to fetch and carry.

Upon the brows of the Port of Madras already dimly glows the word 'Ichabod'; and there is no doubt, too, that the great clearing-house of Calcutta, 'power on silt,' 92 miles up the treacherous, shifting waters of the Hoogly, will feel a strong draught when the doors of the Port of Vizagapatam finally and fully open.



The periodical journey over the lengthy mileage of the district was always a delight, despite the incessant heat. Southward to Waltair, cooled to passable warmth by the breeze from the sea, one found oneself in the land of the Telegus.

Then northward again, through palm-fringed stations, lolling in the brilliant sunlight, cheerful and refreshing. Station staffs of bright-eyed, slim Madrassis with sleek, oily curls and flashing teeth quite different from the

THE WHEELS OF IND

paunched Bengalis farther north. Station names, intriguing and alluring in their aspect, a difficult mouthful for the stranger but rolling off the tongue of the accomplished with sonorous satisfaction. It is said Welshmen achieve early prowess.

Jagannadhapuram, Malatipatpur, Parvatipuram, Gujjangwalasa, Gujapatnagram, to name but a few, which fall like shaken blossoms from the posy of place-names which the rail-road binds together. Station indicator boards are usually painted with the station name in three languages—English and two vernacular, dependent upon the area. As the vast majority of the passengers cannot read, however, the ignorant depend upon oral indication as to where to alight. Unlike the new Irish porter on his first day at the Welsh station of Penrhyndeudraeth, unable to get his tongue correctly twisted round the nominal nightmare, his Indian equivalents do not bawl out, as the train steams in, "All you for here get out. All the others stop in." It is suggested that when these long-winded place-name stations require repainting, the occasion arises to indent for additional supplies of white paint in order to re-inscribe the continuous line of capitals.

Still northward from Waltair we go, through Nampada, with its miles of salt pans, the monopoly of Government, and a magnetic attraction to the law-breaking followers of Mahatma Gandhi. Through the Western windows of the speeding train, the Eastern Ghats still frown upon the line. Now and then huge rocky masses run outward to the sea. Date and coconut palms growing in tropical profusion definitely orient the landscape to English eyes, whilst battalions of green-tufted palmyras stand like an army of giant feather-dusters waiting to sweep away the red dust of the roads which meander through clumps of jungle or cultivated

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

patches, to lose themselves in an azure hazy horizon which hangs 'twixt sky and sea. Heavy, dark-blue buffaloes slowly lumber along a near-by village path to the palm-thatched roofs of the drowsy hamlet, whilst a group of women, working in the fields which lie adjacent to the track, stand straight-backed in the glare to watch the train go past.

Through Kallikota we hurtle, along the shores of that natural phenomenon, the Chilka Lake. Its waters lap almost to the ballast of the track, and all the world to the East is sea. In normal times 350 square miles of imprisoned water lies glassy under the blazing heavens to increase when the floods are out. In the season of winds its surface swells into baby waves, whilst across the three sandy bars which landlock the impounded waters, the rolling breakers of the Indian Ocean resound again and again as they endeavour to batter down the seemingly puny barriers which keep them from their own. Slowly but surely the land is winning in this slow march and the time will come when the great lake of Chilka will be but a name ; and smiling 'paddy-fields' will enrich the scene where to-day the fisher rocks his crude craft and the sea-hawks scream as they forage for their finny food.

In the cold weather the waters of Chilka blacken with untold myriads of waterfowl, which tarry in their passing from the barren wastes of the far North. It is no exaggeration that on many occasions the birds are so abundant that in parts the face of the water is almost completely covered. Possibly the first arrivals have been shot off every piece of water between China and Chilka on their journey south and thus arrive gun-shy and wary. If, on the contrary, they wing their way to the water, innocently placing implicit trust in the two-legged land-birds with guns, tragic experi-

THE WHEELS OF IND

ence soon causes them to revise their estimate. After a week or two they appreciate the advantage of distance and paddle about in carefree abandon, whilst one eye is kept alert to watch camouflaged canoes peopled by optimistic innocents pushing off from the shore. "Quack, quack," they derisively croak, and back, back they joyously float, to keep intact that two or three hundred yards of immunity.

The lake-folk resort to an ingenious scheme to lure the poor ducks to death. A native takes a large earthen *chatti*, or pot. He knocks a hole in for light and air and placing the improvised helmet over his head he gives a slight impersonation of a deep-sea diver. Wading far out into the weeds, for the lake is very shallow, he places two or three wooden decoys on the water and stands submerged. Through his crude periscope he watches the convoys. Presently two or three zealous patrol ducks paddle over, presumably to demand why the painted puppets in the reeds have strayed away from the fold. Their quick black eyes ignore the floating pot, for are not the waters strewn with these discarded *chatties*, which idly float, innocuous and insensate? Straight ahead they swim towards the stragglers, to mysteriously disappear with hardly a flutter beneath the black water, as each goes past the punctured pot. Ten muscular fingers had gripped their moving feet, a swift downward pull had checked their swim for ever and the same fingers had snapped their pipe-stem necks in an almost simultaneous movement. The inane-looking decoys still float with wooden stolidity and the trap is again in working order for further inquisitive inquirers. Satisfied at last, the *chatti* moves for home, and the slim, dark-skinned snatcher strides through the water, naked except for his loin-cloth, through which dangle the dead bodies of a dozen deluded duck.

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

Onward to Cuttack, almost at the North end of the district. Near here, at Harishpuragur on April 1st, 1633—significant date—Robert Cartwright, with seven gallant companions, arrived in a boat that would almost be a disgrace on an ornamental lake to-day. After a skirmish with a Portuguese man-o'-war that resented interference with its preserves, and dealing firmly but diplomatically with the local Nawab, Robert and his daredevil desperadoes dug themselves securely in and blazed the trail in Bengal for the power that stood behind them—John Company.

I was sitting on the platform at Cuttack, one afternoon, musing over the long-dead Cartwright and gazing out upon the waters of the Mahanadi up which he came. The weather, of course, was warm. Very warm, as a matter of fact, and I hazily drowsed in the shade. A south-bound freight train rumbled in, to stop with the centre of its load in front of me. I roused myself and went to have a look at things. As my eyes travelled down the long line of wagons, they rested upon a load, almost unknown in England, but common enough in India. A huge elephant was standing on a low open wagon, his hind-quarters towards me. His little ridiculous tail waved incessantly to and fro, heroically swatting irritant flies—in spirit only, for its natural shortcomings prevented it from actually accomplishing much. The heavy folds of skin and the comic back legs instantly brought to my mind the disreputable baggy trousers of the great comedian of the screen. I was, however, to witness an extract from the repertoire of this humorist of the wild. In front of the shackled elephant's head was a long steel box. Two *mahouts*, or attendants, came down the train and, unlocking the box, took out two buckets for the purpose of procuring water for their giant charge. They casually re-

THE WHEELS OF IND

placed the lid and went down the train to the water supply. As soon as they had nicely got away, *Hathi* turned his massive neck and watched their retreat, whilst his tiny eyes took on that look of low cunning so typical of his kind. Satisfied they were going in the right direction he commenced his burglarious escapade. With the nervous tip of his snake-like trunk he felt all round the box lid in an effort to open it. Round and round he went, pushing here, tugging there. The lid of the box, however, was fastened with a hasp and this security obviously puzzled him. Triumphant at last, his probing proboscis lifted the hasp, and he was home. Thrusting in his trunk he scattered the bundles of rice and fodder, food for himself and his human companions. Time and again moved his trunk. Two inward movements, in the box and in his capacious mouth. Now and then he glanced in the direction of the unsuspecting menials. Up the track they came with water and he replaced the lid. He accepted their teaspoonful-like offering with stolid indifference and they retraced their steps for more. Once again he watched them fade away, and then back to business. No more fumbling and indefinite feeling about the lid. Straight as a fly to a jam-pot, as a moth to a flame, unhesitatingly *Hathi* the artful resumed his interrupted stolen meal. Up went the hasp, up went the lid, in went the trunk and Jumbo stole again. Once or twice he gave me a sneaking glance as I stood on the platform. Otherwise he ignored me. 'All right, my lad,' thought I, 'it's your turn now, you big lump, but just you wait until those two fellows find out their grub's gone, they'll give you a larrupping.' Apparently the elephant wasn't a thought-reader. If he was, he ignored any premonition of coming trouble, for he still persisted in his pilfering and slowly and

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

methodically worked through the contents of the box. The last time I saw him the *mahouts* were still ministering to his wants, whilst he stood immobile and statuesque, looking the perfect picture of guileless innocence, the hoary hypocrite !



Sitting at my desk in the office at Khurda Road, wading through stacks of junk, official and otherwise, I looked up to see the Chief Trains Clerk standing near. "Sir," he said, "I have been arguing with Awasti (a fellow-worker) and he says that in Europe there are trains under the ground. I don't believe it, and I hope you will put him right."

"Awasti is correct," I replied, and proceeded to enlarge on the idea, construction and working of underground systems.

The Trains Clerk listened in respectful silence to my résumé. Blank incredulity showed on his face, he obviously itched to say something, and as I stopped he blurted out, "How do they breathe?" That apparently was the trump card that had left Awasti wallowing in the half-truths of his knowledge. The Trains Clerk propounded the question as a snorter that irresistibly smashed down all dogmatic assertions. I merely laughed at his earnestness and was about to tell of air shafts and electric fans, when he left me in sheer disgust, probably in the belief that I was an even bigger liar than Awasti. In extenuation of the *babu's* ignorance I would say that possibly he had never even seen such a thing as a small tunnel in his life, so perhaps his scepticism was understandable.

In the afternoon a deputation of local Hindus came to see the District Superintendent. He was away, so they were shunted in to me. They had a serious and

THE WHEELS OF IND

gruesome complaint to make against the local Moslems. The latter party buried their dead in a little enclosure and, from what I could gather, their undertaking efforts were somewhat perfunctory. So much so, that their hastily interred departed brethren were coming out again in a manner calculated to shock the moral susceptibilities of the Hindu fraternity, who disposed of their dead in a very definite way by burning them. As an ounce of experience was worth tons of explanation in a case of this kind, a personal visit seemed indicated. Out into the blinding glare we went and headed for the graveyard. Arriving there, a swift glance sufficed to show that for once the Hindu complaint was substantial. Scratched holes in the ground heaved forth human bones in horrible profusion, and there were sufficient skulls rolling around to supply craniums for Act V, Scene i of *Hamlet* to every Shakespearian Company on tour. It looked as if all the pariah dogs in the district had buried their surplus bones in this plot, simultaneously dug them up again and for some unaccountable reason fled the scene.

It was a ghastly business, but fortunately one easy of solution. The Mohammedan Fathers were politely but firmly requested to re-inter the desecrated bones and to ensure that further entrants were definitely put in to stop in.



Come with me down the 28 miles of branch line that runs from Khurda Road to one of the mighty hearts of Hinduism, the great temple of Jagannath at Puri. For days the rails have hummed with the roll of whirling wheels, for the great Festival is near and the simple faithful are hastening to the shrine.

There are many temples in this land of faiths but only

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

one Jagannath, and even if his devotees diminish, as no doubt they are doing, it will be many years before his triumphal car stands desolate and deserted, waiting for those who come not, or his courtyards echo to memory alone.

Hinduism dominates the religious life of India from day to day. Jagannath at Puri with his great festival dominates the Hindu year.

Who is this Jagannath, who commands the ecstatic homage of millions, whose shrine stands supreme in the whole of Hindu India?

From the dawn of recorded time in the Peninsula, the cult, or if you prefer it, as I do, the social structure called Hinduism, has dictated their narrow way in this life and swayed their destiny in the next for hundreds of millions of its adherents. Like all great creeds, it has waxed and waned, smothered in a welter of exotic ritual which dimmed the true in a haze of half-falsities. For a thousand years it grew in mighty strength, until the faith of the great trimurti, Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Siva the Destroyer, filled the land. Out of the travail of its decline it spawned forth one, Gautama Buddha, who was destined to challenge the supremacy of the Hindu trinity. Triumphant the message of the 'Enlightened One' spread to the four quarters of the land, and the neglected trio lay in slumber entangled in the tentacles of the newer faith.

Roused to desperation after centuries of ignominious stagnation, the mighty giants rolled in their age-long sleep and burst the bonds that restrained them. Rejuvenated, they swept away the usurper. To-day, Buddha is almost only a name in the land of his birth, though he still presides elsewhere as the master of millions.

THE WHEELS OF IND

By what means did Hinduism rise again to its pristine splendour? The hierarchy, gathered under the umbrella of the faith, viewed with concern the heedless throng who still frolicked in the rain of unrighteousness. Gathered in solemn conclave, they decided the time was propitious for the birth of a new God.

Many are the legends of the coming of Jagannath, but one is so typically Eastern in its design and execution that all others are immediately discarded. To the waiting millions, shorn from their new creed and anxiously hesitant of the old, emerged from its age-long sleep, a message was thundered. On the shores of the Eastern sea a mighty God would arise, a gift to the newly awakened land. A date was fixed for his coming, sufficiently ahead to allow the eager millions time to journey to the place appointed. On the sandy, surf-beaten shore of the Bay of Bengal at Puri, the priestly caste set about their preparations. A huge pit was dug in the sand and filled nearly to the top with rice. Upon the heap of sacred grain a roughly hewn piece of wood was placed. This was destined to become the earthly home of the new deity. A thin top layer of sand and soil covered the log and the ground was made to appear undisturbed. From the pit to the sea a sloping channel was next constructed, the seaward entrance being blocked by a sluice gate.

The stage was set, the spectacle ready and the audience filed into position. In serried ranks, thousands deep, breathless and hushed, spellbound with awe and reverence, they awaited the coming. At a given signal, waiting priests opened the sluice and in poured the sea to swell the rice.

Each little grain, swollen with water and importance, jostled against its neighbour and pushed and pushed until, to the clanging of cymbals, the throbbing

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

of drums and the wailing of chants, the holy log burst through its shallow covering, to the amazement and delirious delight of the massed millions.

The new deity had arrived !

Wide-eyed, they beheld the seeming miracle and their pent-up feelings found expression in a roar which split the clouds :

“ *Jai Jagannath ki Jai !* ”

“ Hail ! O Lord of the World ! Hail ! ”

“ *Jai Jagannath ki Jai* ” : the hopeful cry of a hopeless faith. Let this phrase steal through your ears and soak into your soul. It is the sonorous salutation that rolls resounding through the holy town. The first cry of the humble worshippers as the wheel-topped fane of the God swims into their ken from the Western windows of the fast-approaching trains ; tramping the red-sanded roads and meandering through the mean alley-ways of Puri they mutter it again and again. Asleep in the humid night, the half-dazed pilgrim, tossing restlessly on his sweaty couch, drowsily murmurs once more the sacred phrase. The ancient stones of the temple and the recent thatch of the huts, the lazy dust of the busy streets and the whispering palms that shade them all dumbly breathe the sacred slogan. The brazen sky glowers down and echoes the resounding call. As the happy, pious pilgrims return again home, exultant still they cry : “ Hail ! O Lord of the World ! ”—“ *Jai Jagannath ki Jai.* ”



For over thirty centuries the peoples of India have wandered over the face of the Peninsula in answer to the calls of their faiths. The Hindu, who to-day numbers 240 millions, was bathing in the holy waters of the Ganges when the Pyramids were but a dream.

THE WHEELS OF IND

He was burning his dead on the banks of the sacred stream when the waters of the Tiber rolled red from the reflected holocaust of burning Rome. From the four quarters of the land, religion called in a voice seldom to be denied, and North, East, South and West streams of humanity, impelled by a simple piety which compels admiration, braved unknown dangers on the road to the Gods. Tramping through dust and heat, fording bridgeless, oft-times crocodile-haunted rivers, limping along tracks which were a horror of stones or quagmire, sleeping beneath the stars, risking death from the wild beasts of the waste lands and those wilder beasts of the road, the *dacoits* and *thugs*. No sanitation, no proper water, little food, often actual famine, all the horrible and loathsome diseases to which flesh is heir slinking by their side. Discomfort and hardship for strong men ; to their weak women and weaker children, a veritable nightmare. Surely the Gods were gracious to those who won through, remnants of a glorious band who had set out long months ago, from some mud-walled village drenched in sunshine against a landscape fretted with palms, or from some stone-walled tower hanging on the dizzy verge of the Himalayas, 'the necklace of the snows.'

Sir William Hunter, describing such a journey to the temple of Jagannath at Puri seventy years ago, states :

"The great spiritual army marched its hundreds and sometimes its thousands of miles along burning roads, across unbridged rivers and through pestilent regions of jungle and swamps. Those who kept to the road had spent their strength long before the holy city was reached. The sturdy women of Hindustan braved it out and sang songs till they dropped, but weaker females of Bengal limped piteously along with bleeding feet, in silence, broken only by deep sighs and an occasional sob. Many a sickly girl died upon the road ; and by the time they reached Puri the



By courtesy, *Indian Railways Bureau*, 57, *Haymarket, London*

STREET SCENE AT PURI.

A group of mendicants laze in the sunlight, whilst in the distance the fane of the Great Temple pierces the azure sky.

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

whole party had their feet bound up in rags, plastered with dirt and blood."

The shrines of pilgrimage in India are legion.

Kedar Nath in the frowning Himalayas to the North, Dwarka Nath through the watery wastes to the West, Rameshwaram lying languid in the heat haze of the far South, holy Benares smothered in an indescribable stench of crushed marigolds and dirt, with its 50-mile radius of sanctity for ever calling, and hundreds more. There are other Jagannath temples in India, there are other car festivals, too, but they are dwarfed by the mighty annual movement of the 'Lord of the World' who himself sits enthroned on the dim altars of his temple at Puri, its *charka* or wheel-crowned pile overlooking the broad waters of the Indian Ocean.

Sacred writ, hallowed custom and a virile priesthood emphatically enjoin that every true believer must visit the shrine of Jagannath at Puri at least once during his earthly existence as a Hindu.

The inner walls of the temple, like those of many other Hindu sacred piles, are dazzling white with lime-wash. The simple souls who flock to Puri at ordinary times are shepherded round these flaring walls under a glaring sun until their eyeballs are almost seared. Hurried through the sunless warrens of the inner rooms, blinded by swift transit from sunlight to shadow, they are rushed past the dim-lit altars where the Gods sit shrouded in gloom, hastened through funereal aisles they plunge again into blinding glare.

Bluffed by this game of 'Blind-man's buff' they complain bitterly. Jagannath they have not seen and their journey is in vain. The greatest merit of all has been denied them. The sophisticated priests meet their puerile outbursts with cold contempt.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Doubtless they are not fitted as yet for the supreme bliss. However, one hope remains. At the Rath Jatra Festival the great one yearly shows his face to the sun and his happy children see the gates of heaven through the glory of his face.

They had better return on that glorious day, when assuredly they will receive great merit and redemption from their undoubtedly many sins.

One supposes the quota has to be maintained somehow, but it seems a sorry business.



At various times the kindly Vishnu, the mighty preserver, has undergone a series of *Avataras*, or incarnations, in order to assist his erring flock on earth. His eighth incarnation was as Krishna, the crafty warrior, frolicsome lover and phallic philanderer. Jagannath, the armless 'Lord of the World' enthroned at Puri, is simply Krishna under another name. Actually, Krishna has been worshipped here for over 2,500 years. Vishnu, Krishna and Jagannath are therefore one and the same.

The rather odd fact of the mighty 'Lord of the World' being deformed and bereft of arms is variously and ingeniously explained. The most simple and true-sounding is the very human account of the female 'Peeping Tom.'

When the holy log burst through the sand on the shores of Puri, Indradyumna, the king of the district, obviously put wise as to his next movement, prayed to Vishnu for instructions. He was told a deity disguised as a craftsman would present himself for the job of fashioning the crude wood to the semblance of a shape. Curiously enough, the prophecy was fulfilled. Vishnu himself appeared in the guise of an aged carpenter and tendered for the work. He stipulated fifteen days

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

for the carving of the image and threatened to down tools if he were spied upon whilst working. Even in those distant days the seeds of despotic labour were sprouting. The King, with the inner eye of revelation, pierced through the disguise of the celestial craftsman and gave stringent instructions he was to be left severely alone to his task. The King, however, like most men of his time and since, had a wife, and she, like many women then and now, was curious. The taboo placed upon the mysterious unknown only served to increase her curiosity.

Woman-like, she spied through a chink in the curtains, and God-like, Vishnu knew. He vanished from the spot, leaving behind the images of Jagannath, his brother and his sister, crudely fashioned from the waist up, with no arms at all for the lady and only two miserable stumps each for her brothers.



In the month of *Joisto*, which corresponds to the English months of May and June, the *Snan Jatra*, or bathing festival, takes place. The Gods are carried out of the dark mysterious depths of the holy place into the broad light of heaven. A huge crowd gathers in the sacred enclosure to watch and pray. The temple priests chant incantations and drench the Gods with liberal libations of cold water, whilst the enthralled crowd from the vulgar world outside prostrate themselves before their Lord in humble thanksgiving. Are they not assured that heaven lies straight before them, when this mortal frame shall perish, the fearsome vista of unknown rebirths for all time removed, by the mere fact of their having witnessed this simple rite? The sacred scriptures definitely affirm this glorious promise, so who would dare to doubt?

THE WHEELS OF IND

At other times all offices for Jagannath and his relations are vicariously performed. His teeth, for example, are religiously cleaned each morning by their reflection in a brass mirror being zealously polished, whilst his morning ablutions are of a nature which would meet with the support of any schoolboy. Water is poured into a huge brass tub and then removed without the face of the idol actually making acquaintance with the fluid.

After this yearly dip the Gods contract a fever. No doubt the sunshine and water combined, after an absence of both for twelve months, prove too much for them. Presumably the ailment, however, is also vicarious. However that may be, all due precautions are taken. Jagannath, his brother and his sister are shut away from their anxious worshippers. Actually advantage is taken of this respite to spring-clean the images. The dirt and dust of the past twelve months is removed. The cow-dung which moulds the face of Jagannath is renewed and repainted and everything made spick and span for the great day. At the end of fifteen or seventeen days, the Gods, convalescent but not cured, sigh for the breezy breath of the sea and pine for a peep at the palms of Puri. They are anxious to come forth on their journey to the little Garden Temple pulled thither by the zealous hands of thousands of vociferous votaries. There is nothing vicarious about the journey, however. It is a glorious reality.



It is not surprising to find that the railway administrations of India have taken advantage of this mass movement from all parts of the Peninsula and have encouraged and exploited it to the full. Carefully prepared propaganda printed in the vernacular lan-

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

guages is broadcast, setting out the great merit earned by pilgrimage and the facilities offered by the rail-road to assist the erring one to achieve speedy absolution. The Bengal-Nagpur Railway has built up a most efficient system of handling the masses of ignorant, illiterate, grown-up children who crowd its trains to Puri bound.

Gone are the travel days and ways of old. The dangers and difficulties and most of the discomforts have been eliminated and, instead of weeks or months of arduous trudging, the pilgrim is caught up in the arms of steam, an incarnation of the great God he is to visit, and carried over the long miles with a celerity which leaves him in a state of permanent wide-eyed amazement. Every convenience is provided to make his journey less strange to him and every possible effort made to get him to his 'Mecca' and home again. Gathered up in the Victoria Terminus of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway in Bombay, shot out of the Howrah terminus of the Bengal-Nagpur and East Indian Railways in Calcutta, flung forth from the Egmont Station of Madras, shepherded and watched, his idiosyncrasies tolerated and suffered, the eager enthusiast is dumped, baffled and bewildered, at his goal, Puri, the home of Jagannath, the 'Lord of the World.'

Can one apportion merit or ascribe spiritual blessing? We think of the millions of old who journeyed to Jagannath under burning skies, each painful footstep bravely bearing their staunch souls farther on. Many sank by the wayside, deserted and forgotten, the food of slinking jackals or loathsome vultures, whilst a fortunate few fought their way through fire and flood to the promise of Puri. We contrast their meagre tale of daily miles arduously achieved with the comparative comfort of to-day when from the farthest corner of far-flung India a day or two in the speeding train

THE WHEELS OF IND

suffices for the journey. The Hindu faith promises equal merit. New days, new ways, but the urge is as of old. The impetus behind the holy trail is still the same. Through the centuries they have come, struggled and died. What matter? The Gods reward intent as well as execution. If the wheel of Vishnu to-day takes on a newer aspect, so much the better. Paradise rolls nearer and the gates of the Blessed lie within each rail-road booking office.



The 1931 Festival attracted 64,309 passengers by rail, 5,000 by road, and 1,000 by water. An analysis shows that the larger share of the pilgrims came from Bengal, whilst the major portion of the remainder hailed from the United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa, the Central Provinces and the Madras Presidency. Every thirty-six years the Gods are renewed, a ceremony marked by a super-festival, which draws the pilgrims to Puri in super-numbers. In 1912, the last occasion on which this took place, over 300,000 pilgrims visited the shrines of Jagannath for the Rath Jatra Festival, 160,000 being carried by the Bengal-Nagpur Railway.

In addition to five ordinary booked trains daily in each direction, seventeen *up* and twenty *down* special trains were run for the 1931 event.



Down the Puri line we go, behind the advance patrols, but ahead of the main army which rolls on behind. Through Sakhigopal with its great temple to Krishna lying in a smother of green-fronded coco-palms. This shrine will coax the early ones or lure the returning pilgrims from Puri to worship 'neath its eaves and thus add to absolution excitedly anticipated or already ob-

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

tained. The dominant impression of the journey is one of palms, standing tall and stately or reeling over the skyline in a riotous reiteration of absurd angles. At Malatipatpur, the station adjacent to Puri, bronzed sons of the soil hawk strings of green-husked nuts and, with one slick of an ugly-looking knife, cut off the top, to pour out in a thin cascade the watery milk which satisfyingly lubricates thirsty throats. In one corner of the platform, a group of stalwart coolie women, bare-limbed and broad-bosomed, happily chatter, splendid specimens of the masculine femininity of rural India. A small red monkey peeps with large round liquid eyes from the safety of the coco-nuts, which sweep the track on either side. The air is tinged with the tang of the near-by sea and the atmosphere breathes calm content, joyous lightheartedness and peace. This we feel is the pictorial India of the story-books for which we have sought so long. The Western windows of the train are filled with the faces of the faithful, eager to catch a first glimpse of the sacred shape, the *charka* or wheel of Vishnu aflame on the whitened fane. As the train draws nearer and nearer, the shining circle of the wheel with its attendant red flags rises higher and higher through the sea of green. A long low monotone rises from a thousand waiting throats: "*Jai Jagannath ki Jai.*" Our hearts beat to the rhythmic roar of the myriad tongues and we catch the maddened infection of the ecstatic spirits of the crooning crowd. Though our lips are dumb we plainly hear the rolling wheels ring out a reiterated rondo, as they pass each open rail-joint. *Jai-jag-annath-jai-jag-annath-jai-jag-annath-ki-jai.* Fascinated we watch the teeming crowds disgorge from the trains at Puri, each group detached and awed with the utter significance of their arrival. They are in Puri at last, their travail ended and heaven

THE WHEELS OF IND

before them. There through the plumous palms, piercing the sky in mighty isolation, is the emblem of the divinity himself, the giant wheel of Vishnu, aloft on the white-fluted tower. As they look an irresistible wave of pious worship again sweeps over them and in low tones once more they murmur, "*Jai Jagannath ki Jai.*" The murmur swells to a roar as their fellow-voyagers catch up the strain, until the mundane precincts of a station platform echo to their cry :

"Hail ! Jagannath ! Lord of the World !"

Then the next special train spawns its throng of white-garmented Bengalis ; like the spume of a restless sea it sweeps the flotsam and jetsam on the platform, bursting through the barriers, in an ecstasy of emotion which India alone can produce. In they pour : high castes, low castes, outcastes and no castes, *fakirs* and fakes, *sadhus* and sinners. White-skinned unbelievers and dark-skinned misbelievers. Every colour, black, brown and yellow and all the shades between. Fathers and mothers, families in tens and dozens, trembling grandams and toddling children, blatant *babus* and modest maidens. Leprosy with its hideous white patch tell-tale, gross elephantiasis and many more loathsome horrors, choleras and fevers, terrible malformations and shuddering human gargoyles liberally besprinkle the throng.

The reek of perspiring humanity and the exhalation of rancid oil from sweat-soaked nakedness hums in the humid atmosphere.

What sights, what sounds, what smells !

A goodly portion of the polyglot races of India is here assembled, strangers in a strange land, the barrier of speech effectively segregating the followers of a common creed.

One recollects the chameleon, that surprising lizard

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

who so obligingly changes the hue of his skin to tone with his surroundings. When placed upon pieces of cloth of varying colours he alters accordingly. It is reported that confronted with a strip of tartan, he burst into pieces in a desperate effort to assimilate himself to the multi-coloured design. In a similar manner, a linguist attempting to understand or be understood by all the teeming horde at Puri would run a grave risk of contracting lockjaw.

Those workshy-willies, ticket-dodgers and ride-stealers, hobos of the East, the pseudo quasi-religious mendicants are of course right in the front of things.

At the 1931 Festival, 6,158 of these happy-go-lucky gentry were detected at Puri Station without tickets, the highest number being 871 on July 16th, which also held the record for a particular train, namely 167.

During the 1933 Festival, doubtless owing to more stringent supervision, only 500 of these fellows arrived ticketless at Puri and its environs. Maybe the diminution in their numbers was accounted for by the fact that only 17,194 pilgrims passed to Puri by rail for that year's spectacle.

A long-whiskered wanderer gleefully told me at one Festival that he had travelled from the south of Ceylon, entirely unconcerned about such petty trifles as tickets or rail fares. He further hoped, all things permitting, to make Benares in the same way after he had completed a local scrounge round of the Puri district. I saw the abandoned old reprobate again the following day in the main street of Puri. As soon as he spotted me he clapped his arms up and down to his sides in the manner of a barn-door cock and crowned his fowl impersonation with several life-like crows. It was impossible to resist smiling broadly at his absurd antics, seeing which he smiled back. Thus assured in

THE WHEELS OF IND

his child-like mind that he and I were pals, I have no doubt he thenceforth travelled completely confident and untroubled, on the slender authority of his acquaintance with a railway sahib. The surprising thing was that despite the colossal number detected coming in and the drastic methods adopted to prevent their leaving, they all got away again to resume their care-free existence. Like thieves in the night, at adjacent stations and signal stops, they rolled into the 'steam *gharri*' which the majority undoubtedly looked upon as being run expressly for their free benefit.

Perhaps the most ludicrous sight I saw was that of four similar souls bowling along through the bazaars of Puri in, of all things, a decrepit Ford taxi. There they sat, obviously newfangled, but consummate masters of the situation. Their dirt-covered hides, bare to the waist and smudged all over with wood ashes, loomed repulsive and loathsome, whilst the emblem of Vishnu shone red on their foreheads and blazoned their status to all. Through the bazaars they went, like dust-covered ancient figures *en route* from the cellars of some museum in which they had long sojourned. The optimistic meter merrily ticked off annas which undoubtedly would never be paid, but no doubt the driver felt that the merit earned by conveying the filth-covered carcasses of these hollow shams of saintliness fully repaid his labour. If his ambition rose to more material recompense, he would most certainly be doomed to disappointment.



Let us wander down the red-sanded *Bara Danda* road to the pile of masonry upon which the world-wide fame of Puri rests. The great broad road is alive with colour and movement, its dust ceaselessly rises and falls in never-ending clouds as the feet of thousands tramp

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

its length. Its grass-lined borders sparkle with the booths of itinerant vendors who are here to make hay whilst the sun of the Rath Jatra continues to shine. Brass work from Benares, calicoes from Calicut and muslins from Madras. Pictures and replicas of Gods and Goddesses in endless profusion of material and design. Bangles and beads, necklaces and nose-rings, jewellery, tawdry and trashy, a brilliant eyeful to coax the eager childlike folk on holiday bent. Fruits and sweetmeats, sticky but satisfying, the crawling-ground for untold flies. The pilgrims flock here in their thousands, but the flies, full-fed and fat, hum in the haze in their millions. Perhaps they too are visiting the shrine of Jagannath, secure in the fact that here in the Hindu Holy of Holies all life is sacred.

After sunset these little shops will be aflame with naphtha flares and terra-cotta candelabras, winking out through the incensed night, whilst like twinkling points of blue the fire-flies flicker and float on the velvet dark. The softened light of oil and grease, with its tiny circle of yellow and its waste of shadow around, is one of the things that we in the West are rapidly losing. To our fairs and open spaces, we harness the latest illuminant. In the steely glare of electric, all details stand out harsh and naked, indecent and ugly, like some painted yellow harridan caught out in the light of day.

The great grey outer walls of the temple loom before us. There is nothing, however, to enthuse over. We listen cold and unmoved to the fact that the outer and inner walls are each 20 ft. high with a space of 11 ft. between and that the temple before us, hoary with antiquity, is but one of many built on this spot to house the 'Lord of the World.'

Were it not for the spiritual significance of its deity

THE WHEELS OF IND

the temple would be accepted as merely another of India's many monuments. It has none of the colossal grandeur of the wedge-shaped fanes of Conjeevaram or the dominant dignity of the Great Temple at Tanjore with the 85-ton pebble placed on the summit to plaster it in position. Unlike the overpowering splendour of Madura, it does not show to the wondering gaze myriads of gods, goddesses, heroes, birds, beasts and fishes reeling in prodigal profusion from base to crest. 'Good wine needs no bush,' and perhaps the master minds that planned the purpose of Puri realized this truth. The spirit of the God permeates the whole of Hindu India and the sanctity of his sanctuary stands supreme.

Within the precincts of his temple lie the shrines of nearly every deity in the Hindu Pantheon, visible tokens of the equality of man, which is the keystone of his worship. Here in Puri, one of the most sacred spots of caste-ridden, conservative, hide-bound Hinduism, paradoxically enough, we find to our astonishment there is no caste. All men are equal in the sight of Vishnu. This socialistic reversal of all that the most bigoted Hindu strenuously clings to is not just so much lip-service. It is imperatively imposed in spirit as well as letter, in deed as well as dogma.

Hinduism in truth has wandered far from the fount of her faith.

Do not, however, conclude that this universal equality is limitless. We can approach the great Lion Gate of the temple, we can watch the unending lines of worshippers streaming in and out, we can boldly march up to the threshold if we will and peer into its mysteries, but that far and no farther. We cannot go inside. None but a Hindu may pass through those sacred portals. What goes on inside the ancient walls is purely

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

a matter of conjecture and hearsay. A Viceroy of India and even the Dalai Lama of Tibet, himself an incarnation of Vishnu, have stoutly and definitely been refused permission to enter. Truth to tell, it seems hardly worth while embracing Hinduism just for the opportunity to pry behind the gateway of Jagannath.

The Police records of Puri tell of three sailors from over the sea, half seas over, once forcing an entrance. The same official document and local gossip, however, are mute regarding their return.

The great temple was erected in A.D. 1188 by Chodaganedeva, the first Eastern Ganga King of Orissa. After seven and a half centuries of undeviating ritual and unchanging ceremony it still continues to flourish. Its annual income, derived from votive gifts and pious offerings throughout these long years, is roughly estimated at £100,000. There are said to be two cellars knee-deep in pearls of great price and rubies of rare lustre, whilst its treasure-chests bulge with the title-deeds of lands and possessions far-flung throughout the length and breadth of the Hindu dominions. Rich and poor, simple peasant and proud ruler have not stinted, indeed have even ruined themselves and their dependants in order to lay their meagre mite or opulent offering at the feet of the God. Perhaps the common leveller of caste discerns, as did another, the simple piety and self-sacrificing spirit that animates the widow's mite. The earthly custodians of his treasures, however, control these riches with that shrewd sense and business instinct which are such marked traits of the Brahmin. This peculiar blending of spiritual service and monetary manipulation is not, however, the peculiar privilege of Hinduism alone.

There is, indeed, much need for skilled supervision

THE WHEELS OF IND

and worldly knowledge. Three thousand resident priests serve the Gods at Puri, whilst the same number of *pandas* spread his fame throughout the land. There are in addition cooks and menial staff in endless numbers, whilst no less than 3,000 dancing girls, or *devadasis*, dance attendance upon the 'Lord of the World.' These ladies, as may be supposed, follow a dual occupation. Altogether, 23,000 persons are almost entirely dependent upon this great living heart for their very existence. Small wonder then that the control of this vast organization calls for one whose abilities are hall-marked with the stamp of a degree from the leading university of England.

We turn from the forbidden barrier of the gateway to see before us the tall fluted marble column of the 'Pillar of the Sun.' Dragged from that orgy of exquisite craftsmanship, the Black Pagoda of Konarak, 21 miles away, it stands pathetic and forlorn. It was placed before this Southern entrance to the temple by marauding Marathas, who lifted it from its rightful home many centuries ago, in that self-helping, appropriating way so characteristic of the times.

The chief interest of the pillar, however, lies in the figure of the Dawn which surmounts it.

Archæologists aver, as they often do, and experts agree, as they seldom do, that this figure of the Dawn is almost unexampled. It is said to be equal to anything that ancient Greece has left behind and perfect in all its parts. I can only acquiesce in the opinion of the learned. I never saw the figure of the Dawn.

It is absurdly small and the pillar is 30 ft. high, so that nothing short of shinning up the column would have sufficed to determine the point. It was too warm for strenuous gymnastics; besides, as I knew, any such monkey tricks would be severely frowned upon by



By courtesy, Indian Railways Bureau, 57, Haymarket, London

THE LION GATE AT THE SOUTH ENTRANCE TO THE TEMPLE OF 'THE LORD JAGANNATH' AT PURI

In the foreground stands 'The Pillar of the Sun,' surmounted by the tiny figure of 'The Dawn,' whilst behind lies the Temple Pile, the *charaka* of Vishnu with its attendant red flags aloft on the white fluted tower

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

jealous Hindu eyes. So I dispensed with the inspection. If the favoured few dogmatically define the artistic value of the figure, I for one am not prepared to dispute it.

Under the shadow of the temple walls, crowds of craftsmen are busily erecting the towering tiers of this year's triumphal cars upon the chassis of former ones. 'Amid the clamour of clattering hammers' the work goes on apace, and the great gaunt structures stand skeleton and bare, waiting for the betinselled cloths which to-morrow will hide their nakedness. Groups of pilgrims tarry in their round of pious wandering from shrine to shrine and gaze with satisfied eyes at this visible, tangible evidence of to-morrow's promised bliss. Two or three sacred bulls, with bovine stolidity, lie in the dusty path and re-masticate their breakfasts, whilst mangy pariah dogs, under the universal protection of the Gods, slink through the unheeding crowd and wander unmolested.

Still skirting the temple we pass the great stone bull built into the old grey walls. Garlands of bright-hued blossoms evince that humble worshippers have performed *puja* at this sacred spot. As we follow on, more break through the never-ending throng to pay their little tribute at this emblem of the great one. Upon our left towers a magnificent *pipal* tree. Beneath the sacred shade of its kind, in thousands of tiny hamlets throughout the length and breadth of the land, humble supplications daily ascend to the altars of faith. Round and round the massive bole of the *pipal* of Puri, with hesitant, timorous tread, the salvation-seeking sinners circle. Its giant roots lie under earth sacred with its shade and trodden hard with the steady tramp of legions of simple souls anxious to shrive themselves from the incubus of a thousand births.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Truly in the Hindu faith the sins of the fathers are fearfully visited upon the children.

A sad-faced matron, still young and comely, in her dingy *sari*, spreads her strip of cotton beneath the spreading boughs. Maybe the *linga* of Siva in her native village has grown impotent. Maybe the Gods are displeased with her. In her extremity she has journeyed to Puri. Her mission is primarily a personal one. Doubtfully but hopefully she waits in her vigil for the sign of Krishna.

A small berry patters down on to the cloth. The Gods be thanked, Krishna has spoken! Her prayer is answered.

What if some clumsy one, dizzy with his continued circumambulation round the tree, has stumbled against the trunk and shaken the berry from the bough? The Gods move in a mysterious way and mayhap in this crude perambulating peasant they have chosen the medium for the sign of their favour. With a glad cry the happy woman seizes upon the emblem of feminine fecundity and joyfully mingles with the passing throng.

Hastening homeward away, she proudly tells her scorning husband that no longer need he dread the bitter gibes and malicious mutterings of more favoured folk. The Gods have spoken—and if their words be twice blessed, the future will not loom barren and sterile before them. When the time comes for him to slip from this birth to another and his waiting spirit seeks escape, the pole that shatters his smoking skull on the funeral pyre, to release the imprisoned soul, will be wielded by the stalwart hand of his firstborn son and the ancient charge of an ancient faith be answered.

The crowd grows thicker as we near the Gates of Paradise.

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

What a scene !

Priests and pilgrims, saints and sinners, mendicants and mountebanks, tricksters and twisters, ascetic impostors, charlatans and shams, malformations and mis-shapes, cripples and lepers with noses, toes and fingers eaten away, in indescribable juxtaposition. Living tombs of darkness turn their fish-white eyes to the noonday glare and wail for alms. Legless, armless and witless hulks crawl in the fetid atmosphere, parading their ghastly deformities, whilst syphilis-saturated moving deaths shamble through the stinking air. Dirt, disease and dust hang heavy like a pall. The sweltering heat of the blazing sun shimmers blindingly down.

Disgusted and sickened, we hurry away from this awful array of horrors, this masquerade of monstrosities. After this sordid sight, the hollow holiness and sham sanctity of the brazen-faced ascetics come almost as a relief.

There one sits on his bed of spikes, his leather-like hide impervious to their points.

Another lies on his back with a brass pot filled with fire perched on his bare stomach. His pot may have an asbestos bottom or his stomach a fireproof top. I cannot say.

With his head and neck buried in sand and the rest of his body sticking up like some strange, exotic plant, a third draws pice and gasps of astonishment from the gaping, credulous crowds. That he breathes through a concealed bamboo tube rather detracts from the merit of his performance, but if he is to repeat his weird wonder at other festivals continued respiration is undoubtedly essential. The dazzled pilgrims, aflame with pious devotion, view with amazement the miraculous sacred cow with five legs. When the sceptical whites suggest to the owner, waxing rich on the pouring pice,

THE WHEELS OF IND

that obviously the extra leg is fastened on with the folds of coco-palm matting that swathe the limb where it joins the body, the insulted custodian ignores the impious thought.

Swarms of *sadhus*, so called, commonplace but confident, squat in the brilliant glare and sanctimoniously scan the sacred writ, apparently aloof, yet wondrously alive to the material things of life. That their book is often held upside down and their ignorance of written or printed script abysmal is a small matter. What they lack in learning and piety is more than made up by their arrogant insolence and cool cheek.

Others exhibit hands and wrists shrivelled and blackened like those of a mummy, through being unflinchingly held time and time again in a searing flame of fire. Over there stands another whose finger-nails, uncut and long with the growth of years, twist and tangle round his hands like the dried tendrils of a pea-plant.

Another stands with his arms aloft like the prophet of old, the muscles and sinews petrified and dead with continued years of enforced idleness. Unable to lower his arms should he now desire it, he stands a maimed monument to fanaticism and a stoicism shrunk to stupidity.

With his bare tongue yet another licks the hot end of an iron bar newly heated in a rude brazier and takes good care the iron is clean and he lingers not too long.

Still farther down the line a flamboyant showman blows streams of fire from his distended mouth, replenishing the snorting inferno from time to time by a swig from a conveniently concealed bottle of oil. As he brings up a lighted taper to ignite the explosive blast of oil-impregnated air, which comes bursting from his pursed-up lips, cries of amazed delight and exclamations of awe rise from the big bairns that stare and

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

gape. Years ago, in the dare-devil days of youth, I had oft performed this self-same trick. My fire-raising impersonation of Vesuvius in full blast, rendered almost perfect by practice, was brought to an abrupt termination, however, by my setting my collar and coat ablaze and scaring myself to less hazardous pursuits. The sight of the human blow-lamp at Puri fanned the flame of memory and I remembered again my boyish escapade.

Lines of non-advertising but not self-effacing medics fill up the gaps. Dishevelled and dirty, with hair matted and unkempt, they laze in the vertical sunshine, scowling boorishly or smiling craftily at the crowd who view their hollow holiness.

Some ignore the passing throng. Through the paths of penance and strict discipline their minds are lifted above the common herd and their eyes fixed on a light denied to others. Anchored to this miserable existence through another of their many births they seek to escape its obligations and responsibilities and win themselves alone to higher bliss. Others with more gross and animal minds also seek to evade the same rough road by repeated doses of narcotics. Stupidly and sullenly they glower around with the reddened eyes and dazed vacuity of the drug addict.

Each of these seeming pundits exudes perspiration and pseudo-piety with a delightful uniformity.

This picaresque collection of talent, of hypocrites and cheats, brazen and blasé, is not a gathering of tricksters, twisters and cheapjacks only. Its genuine austerities are woefully scarce and the sham ones bewilderingly multitudinous, but the halo of Hinduism encircles both. The all-sheltering adaptable umbrella of this ancient 'cult' complacently covers its polyglot peoples. In one way or another, obvious or hidden, patent or profound, the malodorous motley mob bears

THE WHEELS OF IND

witness to the faith. The happy, lighthearted, simple souls who view the scene accept it as such, doubtless in their several minds classifying the rogues and rascals, appraising their separate values and endeavouring, perhaps in vain, to segregate the too-obvious sheep from the camouflaged goats. Here and there, like a small grain in a waste of chaff, we observe some selfless, saintly soul, whose praise has been noised abroad. The constant stream of humanity to receive his blessing and catch the reflected glow from the halo of sanctity which surrounds him, lifts this gathering of robbers and rascals to a higher plane and for one brief moment we feel a whiff of the holiness of Hinduism blown from the courts of the morning ere the twilight shadows came.

Hot and bothered, clammy and sticky, sated with sights and sounds, we feel our way through the ever-present throng toward the seashore and its freshness. We remember the horrors just left and shudder at the recollection of the gleam from this facet of a many-sided faith. Then we recall the humble believers, full of hope and reverent piety, trudging round the sacred tree and the simple faith of the would-be mother as she stood 'symbolic' beneath the dark mass of the *Ficus religiosa*.

Another facet gleams upon the memory ; the thought of the few genuine saints, shining clear and unsullied midst a welter of hollow mockery and travesty of faith.

Surely, we feel, Hinduism holds something beautiful and lasting, some pure and faultless stones in that seemingly interminable necklace of damaged and broken paste which she exhibits to the world.

With these thoughts in our minds we wander past the great Turtle Tank, lying beyond the little Garden Temple. Up and down, down and up the wetted steps the happy people pass. In their thousands, never end-

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

ing, they come and go. Since the early hours of morn these steps have echoed to their tread and the wavelets which ripple the face of the tank have ebbed and flowed since dawn. They bathe and wash themselves and their meagre clothes, paddle about in the puddle, sit in it, spit in it, and finally drink the sacred fluid either by accident or design. With thumbed nostrils and curious sharp jerky genuflexions, they disappear beneath the dark scummed water, bobbing up and down in a hundred different spots like so many multi-coloured jack-in-the-boxes. With their faces to the East they perform the merit-bringing immersion whilst the sacred turtle, temporarily driven from their rightful haunts, try to find a few cubic feet of unencumbered water in which to laze and float.

Like a kaleidoscope, the picture forms and divides, disintegrates and comes together again in an endless panorama of changing sameness. We think of the thousands swarming the temple precincts, of the thousands thronging the great red-sanded road, we visualize the teeming mass near the sacred tree and its environs and the throbbing throng in the chamber of horrors we have just left. Wherever we have been, wherever we may go, humanity swarms : separate entities, yet a cognate whole, moving peaceably and amicably beneath the shadow of the wheel. It is still there, shining aloft, an emblem to the devout. The crowd view the wheel as a symbol, they look to its shape as a sign. My eyes too lift to the *charka* of Vishnu and remind me of the wheels that I follow. A return to the station seems indicated, so we journey back to the rails.

As we leave the Turtle Tank still engulfing and spawning its thousands we notice the crowd of attendant servitors. *Pandits* and priests, shaven and bare, the sacred sevenfold thread of their caste across their

THE WHEELS OF IND

brown bodies, offer their services to inquiring worshippers. Under umbrellas, or out in the open sunshine, they wait at the seats of custom. Astrologers and soothsayers, pedlars and hawkers barter and haggle in a medley of babel, which smites on the ears unceasingly. The same old crowd of deformities and horrors, the same shuddering awful wail of *baksheesh*-clamouring mendicants. The same old hotch-potch of cupidity and greed, chicanery and lies, merrily batten- ing in the name of religion upon the poor pilgrims of Puri.

Disgusted but not dishcartened, for we have to-morrow to look forward to, we push off to the station to *tiffin* and a drink.

A bath, fresh clothes and then, replenished inside and out, we tackle again the crowded street. The railway still continues to vomit forth new batches of eager devotees, who hurry away from the sand-swept station environs to mingle with the flowing crowd and be lost in the sea of peoples. We are anxious to visit the little Garden Temple, for to-day is the last occasion for some time it will be open to non-Hindu males. At any time its doors frown upon prying females of alien faiths. From to-morrow, and for the eight days following, during which period the Gods sojourn there on their fresh-air treatment, the place is doubly-hallowed and its gates strictly barred against all outcastes.

We approach the square entrance at the far eastern end of the *Bara Danda* road. Its portals are guarded by two stone lions, grotesque in design, the nightmare figment of some fabulous fauna. The animals have been repainted in gaudy whites, yellows and reds and look like plaster-of-Paris adverts. for someone's distemper.

We mingle with the throng and enter the temple.

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

Any pretensions it may have had to the name 'Garden' have long vanished. True, the waving palms which peer over its outer walls speak of cool aisles of greenery and verdant shade, but inside every available space is piled up with little shrines, glistening with a white that hurts. A superannuated spotted deer aimlessly wanders over the broken pavements, fearless of the swirling crowds, apparently crushed into apathy at the hopelessness of its forlorn attempt to lend an atmosphere of credence to the epithet 'Garden.'

The walls of the temple proper have been slashed with lavish whitewash. The surplus drainings splash and sprawl over the crazy courtyard and remind one of the cowsheds of Home. A frieze of sculptured deities adorns the outer walls and a casual glance at once makes clear the reason for the embargo on non-Hindu women. Yard after yard of pornographic statuary emphasizes the outward show of the 'cult' of Hinduism which here and elsewhere in a thousand spots exhibits to the morbid gaze, in the words of Lyall:

"The organs of birth and the circlet of bones,
And the loose loves carved on the temple stones."

We glance at line after line of depraved debauchery, enhanced in detail by the new coats of red, yellow, white and blue distemper put on in honour of the yearly visit of the Great Ones from the larger temple down the road.

This is, however, but a retail show of the outpourings of sex-maddened minds; but twenty short miles away, at the great pagoda of Konarak, there is a wholesale warehouse of the beastly stuff.

We talk with two of the temple priests, paunched and portly, and enter the building. Long rambling

THE WHEELS OF IND

warrens of gloom, dark and mysterious loom before us. To the left, through a lesser gloom which indicates a doorway, dimly glow three small flickering lights, like lone stars in a sea of night. I take but one step across the threshold, when a priest seizes me by the arm and detains me.

"Nay, Sahib, not in there. Those are the places prepared for 'The Lord Jagannath'."

Out into the light once more, past the leering obscenities of the frescoes, out through the circus-like gate, and into the busy street, under the smother of green-plumed palms whose long fingers sway to the intermittent breeze which breathes over the hot land from the rolling, resounding breakers of the Indian Ocean which lies but a step away.

At the rest-house that evening we railway officers, gathered together from all quarters of the 3,400-mile system, discuss and finally settle the details for dealing with the following day's spate of returning pilgrims.

The Bengal-Nagpur Railway Company's Officers' Rest-house at Puri is superbly set. Right on the sandy shore of the Indian Ocean it faces the waste of sea whose farther waters wash the bleached beaches of Burma. Lying on the verandah of this rest-house at night, cooled by the breath of the sea, and soothed to sleep by the murmurous move of the sleepless waters, is an experience to be remembered. Far from the noise and fret of the humming mob of the Town, one feels the calm content of the night.

The moon shines down on the shelving beach and, alternate and slow, one hears the surf sullenly beat a sequacious monotone of solemn sound, which fills the whispering air. Now and then some giant wave, the seventh of its race, smashes down on the sodden

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

sand and harkening to its challenge we say with Arnold :

“ Listen ? you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves suck back and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The Eternal note of sadness in.”

It was worth coming to Puri to appreciate those lines.

Under the heaving heat of noon, the sands smite hot and stifling. I had often heard of the saying ‘ walking like a cat on hot bricks,’ but it was not until I tried to walk two or three steps barefooted on the beach at Puri that I appreciated the full significance of the expression. To say the sand was hot is putting it mildly ; it was reminiscent of an Anglo-Saxon trial by ordeal. The sloping beach slides steeply into the water and a few feet from the point where the wave-edge laps the sand, one is out of one’s depth ; whilst the undertow sucks with an insistency that demoralizes all but the most stalwart of swimmers. Small wonder that at each Rath Jatra Festival a few of the inland pilgrims who come to worship on the sacred strand and bathe in the sacred sea sink entrapped under the waters which roll beneath the shadow of the wheel.



I awake at dawn on the morning of the great day, full of anticipation at the opportunity of witnessing the crowning triumph of the ‘ Lord ’ of the oldest faith in the world. The surf breaks sullen and grey against the sandy beach and even at this early hour batches of eager pilgrims are dipping joyously in the treacherous waters of the sea whence the mighty Jagannath came.

Down to the station I go where the eleventh-hour

THE WHEELS OF IND

specials come speeding in, packed to capacity. Up till noon these trains will come, carcering down the coast line, with their cargoes of enthusiasts who have dallied on their way or delayed the journey until almost too late.

Away from the station, through the groves of dark-green sand-swept trees, towards the Temple. Camped under the spreading branches of sacred *pipals* or secluded 'neath the shade of feathery palms,' the temporary encampments of Kols, Santals, Bhils and other jungle-tribes make the scene picturesque. On either hand long lines of happy, gesticulating, merry pilgrims, converging toward the Temple, tell their own tale of the magnetic attraction enshrined there.

Outside the Lion Gate of the Great Temple, the finishing touches are being put to the great festival cars. Resplendent in costly red cloth, festooned with gold and beflagged like a signal ship, they tower above the Pillar of the Sun. Nearby lie coiled the huge hempen hawsers, like so many giant snakes.

The cars are three in number, solidly and crudely constructed, barbaric in design and decoration. The largest, the chariot of the 'Lord of the World,' is 45 ft. high, 35 ft. square and is supported on sixteen wheels, each with a diameter of 7 ft. These wheels are placed in pairs, along the sides and under the centre. The triumphal cars rise in tiers supporting a crude, roomy platform which yawns over the wheels on either side, like an Irish jaunting car. Upon this platform the God is enthroned; whilst the surplus space of the thrice-hallowed area is littered with priests, dancing girls, musicians and sundry others whose spiritual influence or material affluence has secured for them a passage on what must be one of the most unusual journeys in modern transport.

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

These three cars are to be drawn by a sweating, happy and enthusiastic throng of pious worshippers, from the Lion Gate of the Great Temple down the great palm-bordered *Bara Danda* road, a mile and a half long and eighty yards broad, to the little Garden Temple which waits for its distinguished guests at the end of the sandy street.



Far back in the misty past, Kansa, the Demon King of Mathura, the epitome of evil, was forewarned by a seer that a son born of Devaki, the wife of Vasudeva, would one day slay him. The frightened King, anticipating Herod, slew the six existing sons of the luckless pair, thrust the parents into prison, kept them there and doubtless felt he had thwarted fate.

The seer might have possessed good vision, but Kansa was distinctly short-sighted. Perhaps he but strove in vain against a predestined end.

In that simple solution-finding way peculiar to the Gods of many mythologies, Kansa's machinations and drastic methods were easily circumvented. The seventh son of the imprisoned pair, Balabhadra, was miraculously transferred from the womb of Devaki to that of Rohina, another wife of Vasudeva, and so preserved.

The mills of the Gods for the crushing of the spirit of evil were at last beginning to turn.

The moment was not yet ripe, however.

The mighty one had still to appear.

The night Krishna, the eighth son of Vasudeva and incidentally the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, was born to the humble instruments of the vengeance of the Gods, the father, aided by the great ones, escaped the prison. Crossing over the Jamuna River he delivered the new-born babe to the kindly care of the shepherd

THE WHEELS OF IND

King of Braja. With his foster-father the young Godling grew to stalwart manhood, his growing years emblazoned with more than mortal prowess, somewhat reminiscent of the feats of the infant Hercules. The Demon King, as might be expected, heard of this mighty youth and sent for him and his brother to come and be slain. The two warriors, instead of tame submission or panic-stricken flight, flew in their chariots to Mathura and removed Kansa from his Kingdom by the simple expedient of removing his head from his shoulders.

The great car festival commemorates and typifies, amongst other things, this victorious journey.

There are certain obscure whisperings and sniggering innuendoes of the mighty Krishna philandering around with some milkmaids of Puri. Each night after the little hump-necked cows were milked and safely parked away, the frolicsome deity was wont to take the country damsels for a jaunt in his chariot.

Perhaps, however, we should not place too much credence on this slight scandal, but accept the triumphant sweep of the all-conquering Krishna against the forces of evil as being the germ idea which lies behind to-day's progress of his car. Still, there are certain worldly folk who subscribe to the more human milkmaid episode.



The morning drags on, the heat increases and slowly the great space of the *Bara Danda* road fills with the faithful. As far as the eye can see, the eighty yards' breadth of street is packed with humanity meekly awaiting the advent. A sea of shaven heads meets the gaze, as the worshippers wait in the oppressive heat with a stoic patience engendered by centuries of servitude.

The three great cars are pulled into position near

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

the Pillar of the Sun ; the crude bamboo ramps, up which the Gods will be dragged to their exalted thrones, are affixed ; and through the waiting, expectant multitude spreads a wave of excited anticipation. The English Police Superintendent and his Indian staff keep clear a roped-off space around the cars, whilst first-aid detachments hover anxiously around looking for customers.

The noon-day rays of the sun pour down on the packed pilgrims as, with great pomp and ceremony, Balabhadra, the brother of Jagannath, is placed in his car. Massive ropes are fastened on and pulled by willing hands he moves on his lumbering journey down the *Bara Danda road*. The roped-off space around the wheels keeps clear the zone of danger, in case of accident, whilst clouds of dust rise like incense to the God and mark the progress of his ride.

An hour passes. With similar pomp and style, Subhadra, the sister, is enthroned and she follows in the wake of her brother.

Another sixty minutes and the still-packed masses surge restlessly to and fro, heaving on the waves of religious fervour. The great moment is at hand. An air of suppressed excitement which can almost be felt blows down the sacred street. The Temple portals are alive with movement. Through the Lion Gate come a hundred backward-moving priests doing obeisance to their Lord, who is borne on a litter carried on the shoulders of another hundred priests, whilst before him in humble duty, a local *Rajah*, who rejoices in the title 'Sweeper of the Temple of Jagannath,' brushes the ground before him with a jewelled broom. Bringing up the rear of the procession come another batch of priests, whilst bands of musicians armed with droning conch shells, blaring trumpets and clanging cymbals add to the hideous din.

THE WHEELS OF IND

On either side of Jagannath a priest armed with a yak-tail whisk swats all sacrilegious flies, whilst before him others fan the stolid mask of the master of millions. The great coal-black, cow-dung-fashioned face of the God with its huge staring eyes, shrouded in a voluminous head-dress of peacock feathers, looks grotesque, like a Guy Fawkes effigy in gala dress. His body is covered with priceless brocade and cloth of gold, weighted down with brilliant jewels, in unbelievable profusion. Upon his forehead glints a priceless diamond which captures and flings back the rays of the descending sun, which likewise glints upon the palmless silver arms which have been fixed, especially for to-day, to the deformed deities.

As Jagannath, the inspiration of Hindu India, appears to his followers, packed thousands deep in the palm-fringed thoroughfare, a long-drawn "Ah-h-h-h-h-h!" from the waiting oncs fills the hushed air and every shaven head goes down to the dust before him. With Herculean efforts the cordon of police keep back the maddened mob and for one moment, standing near the car of Jagannath, I wonder what would happen to the handful of white-skinned unbelievers if the dam burst.

Unceremoniously a rope is placed around the neck of the deity and he is hauled on to his throne. When seated thereon his priests do him reverence to express their contrition for this necessary indignity. The fly-fanners resume their stations, the band entrain, and the dancing girls take up their positions. The huge ropes, each as thick as a man's arm, are affixed, and the flood of fervent folk, sweeping away the barriers like so many straws, surges over all obstacles in their efforts to touch the car of the Lord.

The sight of Jagannath to his flock is bliss unimagin-



By courtesy, The Bengal-Nagpur Railway Co., Ltd

THE RATHI YATRA OF 'THE LORD JAGANNATH,' AT PURI.

The three great festival cars, beflagged and tinselled, wait in the oppressive heat for the 'Great Ones'



By courtesy, The Indian Railways Bureau, 57, Haymarket, London

THE GOD MOVES ON HIS JOURNEY

To the incessant intonation of the mighty cry, 'Jai Jagannath ke jai,' the God moves on his journey down the red-sanded, palm-fringed *Bara Danda* to the little Garden Temple near the sea.

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

able. Merely to 'touch his car brings peace to the widow, fertility to the barren and sons and cattle to the faithful.' To haul on the hempen hawsers is redemption from all sin. Even to touch them brings the same splendid reward. To observe the pious sincerity and simple faith of the eager-eyed thousands who pay their reverence to the Great One, kissing the wheels and structure of the car and even the great ropes, is an inspiration.

There are few doubting Thomases in the humble crowd. To them Jagannath stands for an all-embracing, living reality. They fully believe the promise made and implicitly expect the divine reward.

The first insistent demands of the forefront of the throng having been in some measure appeased, the attendant priests exhort the faithful to pull their 'Lord' on his journey. Other priests line the side of the car and, gesticulating wildly, endeavour to make themselves heard above the thunderous repeated shouts of "*Jai Jagannath ki Jai.*" The band wax frantic in their horrible cacophony, whilst before the idol the temple girls, gorgeously robed, begin to shuffle and sway on the unsubstantial-looking platform which threatens to cave in at any moment. The pipers of the Bihar and Orissa armed police bleat shrilly on the clamorous air, as they form up to escort the Great One to his temporary resting-place. With eager cries the multitude seize upon the ropes and with songs of joy and a few ponderous jerks the 'Lord of the World' moves on his way.



Daniel Webster defines 'Juggernaut,' as he terms him, as "an idol among the Hindoos whose temple is situated in Orissa and has a kind of pyramidal

THE WHEELS OF IND

carriage 200 ft. high. Formerly pilgrims were accustomed to sacrifice themselves by falling between its wheels when in motion."

When William Bruton of the good ship *Hopewell* visited Puri in the sixteenth century he earned for himself the distinction of being the first Englishman to tread that holy ground. He also earned the opprobrium of the Hindu ruling castes by the causticity of his comments anent the Rath Jatra Festival. When he got going William did not mince matters. Listen to him :

"And when it (the chariot of Jagannath) is going along the city, there are many that will offer themselves a sacrifice to this idol, and desperately lie down on the ground, that the chariot wheels may run over them whereby they are killed outright; some get broken arms, some broken legs, so that many of them are destroyed, and by this means they think to merit Heaven."

A later adventurer named Bernier waxes more severe still in his condemnation. He tells the world :

"And while the chariot of hellish triumph pursues its solemn march, persons are found (it is no fiction which I recount) so blindly credulous and so full of evil notions as to throw themselves upon the ground in the way of its ponderous wheels, which pass over and crush to atoms the bodies of the wretched fanatics without exciting the horror or surprise of the spectators !"

Why the yearly festival of a deity to whom the sacrifice of life of any kind is most abhorrent should have become symbolic of death and destruction it is difficult to explain. The erroneous impression falsely created and widely held seems to be somewhat in the nature of an account of an 'extinct custom which never existed.' No doubt in the good old days accidents occurred. In the maddened rushes to view the Gods the weak and infirm might sometimes be thrown

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

before the giant wheels which cannot be stopped or guided, and so be crushed before they could be rescued. Again a few determined suicides, pain-racked or diseased, might have thrown themselves beneath the irresistible monster of a car, and doubtless mothers-in-law are no more popular in India than they are supposed to be in the West. More often than not, however, the whole affair passed over with nothing more serious than might be expected from a huge gathering of the kind. Certainly self-immolation was never countenanced or encouraged.

To-day the whole car-pulling festival is organized and supervised by Government. The cars, formerly unbraked, are now chocked by means of a huge tree-trunk which blocks the wheels in case of a runaway. I did notice, however, on the *Bara Danda* one slight depression where no doubt a huge, ponderous, unbraked, laden car getting a slight impetus would create havoc amid a tightly packed mass of humanity unable to escape on account of the pressure of the crowd behind.

To-day the Police march with the cars and any idiot seeking notoriety beneath the wheels of the deity is picked up before he is damaged, and removed from the spot. It is satisfactory to know that these precautions have resulted in no deaths being recorded for many years and one hopes a continued clean sheet will serve to remove the stupid stigma attached to the name of the kindly deity who is known to his followers as the 'Preserver' and only to the Western world, through calumny, as a destroyer.



The road has been ploughed up by the wheels of the two preceding cars and that of Jagannath slowly lumbers along through a deep lane of adoring ones.

THE WHEELS OF IND

To the incessant intonation of that mighty cry "*Jai Jagannath ki Jai*," his wheels move forward. The temple girls continue their performance before the idol, whose round white eyes loom out from the gloom of the canopy above. Blaring conch shells, booming gongs, clattering cymbals and now and then, through holes in the cover of sound, the shrill squeak of the pipes, mingle meaningless together. Even now, as before, the resounding salutation thunders to the God, as new eyes pick out his sombre form in the dimness of the shrouded car. The resultant din delights rather than deafens the ears. The folk lining the trench whose walls they are, sway and surge forward as the car of the Great One slowly creaks nearer. Their eagerness to see this concrete emblem of their ancient faith causes a good deal of anxiety to the Police who guard the wheels, zealously watching for unfortunates pressed down by the weight behind. Jerking and creaking, groaning and squeaking, by fits and starts, in a cascade of discord which tumbles from its tiered terraces to splash back in a redoubled spray of sound, the edifice waddles through a sea of exuberant ebullition bursting from the excited enthusiastic devotees who adore and admire. Less vociferous votaries, mainly patient-faced women, mingle with the shouting throng and offer up their little simple prayers to the elevated platform sanctified and hallowed by the presence of the Great One, for a husband, a father, a brother, a son or a loved one on a bed of pain far back in some mud-built little hut asleep in the noon-day sun. A hope deferred or a promise persistently postponed. Who knows, save he who listens and makes no sign? Whatever the silent prayer may be, it breathes sincerity and simple hope and what more can the Gods desire? Votive offerings of pice, rice, fruit, flowers and favours fall in a

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

continuous shower on to the rocking platform where waiting priests gather up the spoils.

The car rumbles off the middle way and lies bogged in the heavy sand. It tilts alarmingly for one brief moment and the anxious watchers fear it may upset. The motley crew aloft dash hither and thither in useless endeavour. The straining human horses sink exhausted in their unavailing efforts to pull it clear. On the front of the car a row of crude wooden horses of infantile proportions but of a hoary history, symbolically pull the chariot.

On one of these useless and by no means ornamental dummies a tall thin priest, naked to the waist, takes his stand whilst behind him waits a colleague to take his place should he get spun up through a too limited vocabulary. There is little chance of this, however. At best the second line can only hope to give moral support. Hindustani, whatever its other defects, is probably the world's most fluent language to curse in.

The local jockey spares them not.

He lashes the sweating labourers with his tongue.

"What will Jagannath think of this impotent futility? Pull, you misbegotten . . . etc. etc. May Jagannath smite you with plague! May your cows die and your crops perish! Hell yawns for such as you! you misbelieving, lazy, idle good-for-nothings, you . . . etc. etc."

The harassed crowd, taunted and stung to desperate endeavour, haul till their eyes stand out like organ stops, and the veins rise like cords on their bronzed limbs. The great ropes grow taut again, but despite the frenzied heavings of the despised flock the car remains as it was, stuck and stationary.

On the assumption that every little helps, a companion and myself grasp a rope too and lend our united efforts to the common task.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Immediately the orator switches upon us.

"Look!" he shouts to the yelling, sweating, heaving mob.

"Look! even the Sahibs pull! Paradise awaits them for their service to the God!"

Scorning to be outdone by a couple of outcastes, renewed efforts are made and hundreds more dash to assist or impede by their very numbers.

"*Jai*"—heave—"Jagannath"—heave, a mighty tug,—"ki *Jai*"—a Herculean effort, and riotous and happy, sweating but victorious, still lashed by the bitter insults of the gentleman on the hobby-horse, they get the goliath creaking again on its way.

The car of Jagannath must not go backward. The procession of the 'Lord of the World' must be one of continued triumphal progress. The lack of steering gear on the chariot rather complicates a correct manipulation of its movements. If by mischance it drunkenly reels off the road and comes up against an obstruction, that barrier must come down, and at once.

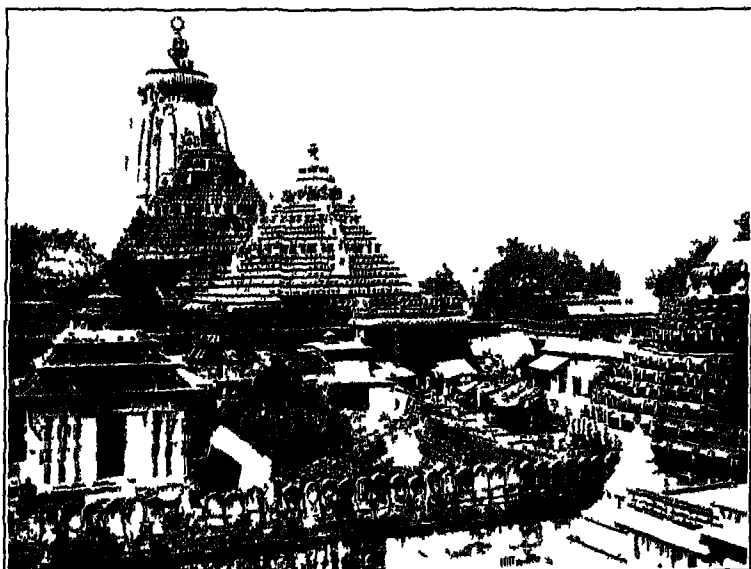
Whilst the journey normally occupies only a few hours, it has on occasion taken much longer. The record, I believe, is five days, during which hectic passage practically all the structures lining the *Bara Danda* road were razed to the ground.

Stopping, starting, now hesitant and slow, now hurrying along, as if the guardian priests were anxious to put their charge to bed before the failing sun fades in a too brief twilight, the procession proceeds.

The happy multitudes, their spiritual ambition assured, roll along behind the wheels of Jagannath. The temple elephants, painted with the all-seeing eye of Siva, shamble through the lengthening shadows, indifferently accept pice from pious pilgrims and gaze upon the whole spectacle with a bored, 'fed-up' expression en-



THE LION GUARDED
ENTRANCE TO THE
LITTLE GARDEN
TEMPLE PURI AT THE
EASTERN END OF THE
BIRI DINDI ROAD



By courtesy, The Indian Railways Bureau 47, Haymarket, London.

THE TEMPLE OF JAGANNATH AT PURI—EAST FRONT

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

gendered by having witnessed similar sights for a century past.

In a little back-water of the crowd, removed from the turbid mass which swarms round the cars, we observe a group of patient folk. Aborigines from some far jungly retreat, they hang together for mutual protection, their little-known dialect keeping them a pool apart from the roaring river around. Childlike and happy they grasp a promiscuous piece of rope, oblivious of the fact that its two ends finish in nothing and connect nowhere.

We see them again hours afterwards, still standing, clutching the loose limp hawser.

Their primitive brains apparently register some hazy impression of Jagannath and ropes, and the fact that they are in Puri and have a rope seems to satisfy their unacquisitive intellects.

Uncomprehending, they fail to realize that Jagannath and his car, shut off by the wall of folk before them, have passed by long ago. Our last view of them before the swirling returning crowds swallow them up is like our first. Still they stand, monuments of patience, dumb and definite, waiting and waiting for something to happen. We are shocked by their stupidity and appalled by their ignorance, but maybe their reward is more assured than those sophisticated pharisaical pilgrims who loomed large in the van of Jagannath and shone in the reflected glory shed around. The Gods reward intent as well as execution. Our simple friends from the jungle wilds lamentably failed definitely to stake their claim to Paradise by hauling on the right rope, but surely they got full marks for their dog-like devotion and simple sincerity.



THE WHEELS OF IND

At the end of the period of seclusion in the Garden Temple the Ula Rath Festival takes place when the Gods, restored to rude health, are hauled back to their rightful home.

By this time the fever of excitement has died down and despite many diversions designed to coax the apathetic pilgrims to remain, the vast majority have returned home.

There thus results a deficiency of free haulage power and although a number of *ryots*, or peasants, hold their lands near Puri in virtue of their services at car-pulling festivals, these alone are insufficient for the task and the aid of Government has to be sought to augment their meagre numbers with gangs of paid coolies.

Thus are the mighty humbled.

Hauled in royal state by enthusiastic, revering thousands, through scurried ranks of thousands more, worshipped and adored by all, they made their progress from the Great Temple to the smaller. The tumultuous peal of the thrilling, throbbing "*Jai Jagannath ki Jai*" dies fitfully away, merging into the roar and babel of the world outside. Dragged unceremoniously by mercenary muscles, they retire again to the dark shadow-depths of their altars to await the slow march of another year before again they see the sun.



The sinking sun is tinting the *charka* of Vishnu on the Great Temple fane with pink-flushed shafts of light, telling the faithful, aimlessly wandering about the great dusty road, that the day is fast closing, that night is nigh and the show over. With waning enthusiasm they look forward with dread anticipation to the long journey home. The anxiety proves infectious. With

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

one accord they rush for the railway station and our work begins in earnest.

Loaded with goods and chattels, families scattered and lost in the medley of peoples, they move like sheep, shepherdless and lost, toward the rail-road. Littered up with sacred peacock feathers, sticks of sugar-cane and useless gew-gaws, trashy and trumpery, bought under the dazzle of the wheel, they wander about, helpless and bewildered. Many carry supplies of *bhog*, or sacred rice, cooked in the temple and bought at the 'Ananda Bazaar' in the purlieus of the holy spot. Vast quantities of rice are cooked at the festival for the Gods and vicariously offered them. As Jagannath and his relatives are permanently off their meals, the sanctified rice is sold to the worshippers who are only too eager to buy, to carry home the blessed food to their unfortunate stay-at-home brethren.

Getting the horde to Puri had been a simple operating matter. By ordinary train and special the mounting thousands had poured into the town for days past. Now, in panic-stricken anxiety, they storm the station precincts and clamour to depart, each expecting to get away on the first light engine to leave.

It is impossible to give an adequate idea of the mentality and outlook of the heterogeneous mass of humanity which surges around the station buildings. Panic-stricken and afeard, baffled and bewildered, lonely in the midst of thousands, singly or in detached groups they wait, utterly devoid of the slightest traffic sense as we understand the term. Gathered from a thousand districts and villages, speaking almost as many dialects, they sit around in groups, with an animal look of patient waiting in their dark eyes and an unplumbed depth of confidence in the sahibs' magic to get them home again.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Group after group, cluttered up with bedding, food, utensils and few luxuries, uncomprehendingly wait and wait.

Their infantile faith in any piece of paper as being good for a ride in the 'steam *gharri*' is pitiable in its simplicity.

A prey to the sharks and scoundrels who move amongst them on mischief bent, they sit huddled together in the deep shadow-depths of the palms or stark and clear-cut in the silver of the rising moon. Illiterate, ignorant, cut off one from the other by unknown tongues, helpless and hopeless, useless and unhelpful, many smitten with deadly and contagious Oriental diseases, they present a problem not easy of solution.

Railway guides and linguists move among the peoples, giving simple and foolproof advice, soothing anxious doubts, smoothing unreal apprehensions and, at intervals, detecting the rascals and confidence tricksters battenning on the credulous crowds.

Look! yonder, under the dark shadow-depths of a mango tree, whose higher branches stir in the freshening breeze from the broad bright bay beyond. A smooth-tongued, oily *babu*, some sneaking, half-baked, semi-learned cheat from the malarious marshes of Bengal, approaches a little group of villagers. They hail from a tiny hill-side hamlet a thousand miles to the North. For many minutes now they have been talking amongst themselves, endeavouring to fathom the baffling intricacies of how to get those wonderful pieces of pasteboard which magically and successfully cry "Open Sesame" to all the many barriers which lie between them and their home.

Discussion ends again in dismal failure. They despair of a solution and cast dog-like appealing glances around at the unheeding throng, busy with a hundred similar problems.

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

Our smug scoundrel, with soft-soapy words of greeting, insinuates himself. He speaks with them. His heart, kind, gentle soul, goes out to them in their dilemma. He knows all the subtleties of this ticket business. He is *au fait* and on familiar ground with all railway regulations. And the railway sahibs, remote and distant, are but as dust beneath his feet. Help them, of course, he will. They pour forth their thanks in a spate of words. Jagannath is good in sending them a counsellor, guide and friend.

They tell him their far-away destination and hand over their precious rupees, garnered a pice at a time through the long years in anticipation of a life-long ambition.

Off goes the protector of the poor into the night whilst the little group, now happy and laughing, child-like in its unsophistication and lack of suspicion, waits in the windy dark.

Back to the waiting group returns the kind-hearted stranger. Into each hand, stretched expectantly forward, he places a ticket.

A swift glance in the muffled moonlight. The size, the shape and the unknown marks across its face. It is indeed a *tikkut*.

Each owner immediately accepts with many thanks and a bland simplicity which is a godsend to tricksters and a continual source of trouble and irritation to the administration.

The little group parts from its seeming benefactor, with many mutual *salaams*, never to meet again.

Joyfully the ticket-holders embark, to be ejected at the first checking point. Their much-prized *tikkuts* have let them down flat. They are only available to Malatipatpur, the next station to Puri and as they are thrown out on to a desolate platform they utter threats of wrath

THE WHEELS OF IND

to come if ever again they clap eyes on their late deluder. Stranded, penniless, ticketless, hungry and tired, strangers in a strange land, it remains for a kindly administration to send them to their home whilst the same benign power gaols the swindler—when it gets him.

In order to overcome in some measure the language difficulty and the illiteracy of the returning pilgrims, the use of colour is resorted to. Temporary booking-offices, plainly and generously indicated, are erected. White, green, pink and yellow tickets are issued whilst the continued sequence of colours in lamp and sign simplify as far as possible the segregation of the swarming souls who seek to leave.

Four huge roofed steel pens, permanent and solid, each capable of accommodating 1,500 pilgrims, have been erected. To prevent overcrowding and possible chaos, never more than approximately 1,000 passengers are allowed to enter at one time. No one is admitted to the platforms without first passing through these pens which segregate the pilgrims according to their ticket colours. One can hardly imagine an English Railway administration attempting to pen off its football crowds and show traffic passengers in this way. Steel bars would never suffice for them. They would have to be reinforced asbestos to withstand the sulphurous language from the enraged inmates.

This is India, however, and other countries, other peoples, other ways.

As each empty rake of coaches is backed into the platform, ready to receive its complement of eager passengers, the gates are opened. Three officials, strenuous, stentorian and stalwart, allow about one hundred passengers at a time to dribble from the requisite pen on to the platform. There a string of coolies, joining hands, fills each carriage in turn till the train is loaded,

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

whistled out and away. Then another takes its place, and so on through the night. As far as is humanly possible every effort is made to lodge together the members of each family, village, tribe or area, particular attention being paid to the dothering aged folk.

Through years of experience the Bengal-Nagpur Railway administration has learnt how to handle this crowd of returning pilgrims in a manner efficient and thorough. Every attention is paid to those Asiatic complexities which do not exist to worry the railway officer of more Western lands. All cases of cholera, small-pox, and plague, those dread scourges which can panic a crowd to fatal apathy in an amazingly short space of time, must be promptly reported through channels previously laid down. Drastic and swift action is taken to isolate the infection and disinfect the affected rolling-stock.

Station Masters have peremptory instructions that station wells are not to be touched except by authorized persons and that no passenger must dip his personal *lotah*, or brass drinking-vessel, into the common water-pail. Each thirsty soul is supplied direct by the railway *pani-wallahs*, or water-men. Drinking-water is provided at intervals of not more than 30 miles and an organized system of supply ensures that all the teeming folk are watered as well as fed.

Special guides travel with each pilgrim train to see that the arrangements as regards water and food work smoothly. They are also charged to prevent overcrowding and to do everything possible to render the journey as comfortable as they can under the circumstances.

The wares of licensed sweetmeat and other food vendors are inspected at unsuspected moments and stringent efforts maintained to prevent an outbreak of disease. By these untiring methods, cholera, which alone

THE WHEELS OF IND

accounted for thousands of deaths at former Puri Rath Jatra Festivals, has been almost eliminated.



Let us dive into the yelling, smelling mob throwing itself in aimless struggles against the steel barrier of the pens, or crouched in little pools of darkness in the sea of silver moonshine.

Pick your way carefully. Deep hidden in the shadows sprawl shrouded forms, sleeping in the babel of noise and waiting for the dawn. The day is but a step away and the trains that roar away to-night will still snort forth in the morning.

Bundles and baggage, flotsam and jetsam from every province of Hindu-India, lie haphazard on the ground. Naked bodies loom in the darkness, white eyes ghostily reflect the fitful gleams of yellow light which stagger and swirl through the humid night as their bearers serpentine through the mazy crowd. A jangle of anklets from an inky blackness premises patient women as they restlessly stir in their waiting. The roar of tongues, shrill and penetrating, beats for ever on the cars, the higher noises subdued by the formless, inarticulate hum which buzzes all around.

We work our way to the barriers and prepare for action. Under a brilliant moon, which renders artificial light almost unnecessary, flooding the place with a dazzle of light and accentuating the dark shadow-depths, we handle the struggling crowds. Families and friends get separated ; some inside the pens, some outside. Some of those within wish for no reason to get out again, and numberless others, outside, ticketless, are endeavouring to get in. The gates get blocked with yelling pushing humanity, and idiotic souls, panic-stricken in the belief they are to be left, attempt a

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

short cut through the narrow spaced bars and get stuck. Look at that fool there, a thick-set Bengali with a thicker head. He has no ticket and apparently no wherewithal to purchase one. Time and again he tries to bluff his way past the wary wardens of the gate and time and again he is ejected by the attendant police. We curse him, threaten him, and even slap him, but still with a bulldog tenacity worthy of a better incentive he rolls up again. Definitely and decisively, in no uncertain fashion the 'chuckers out' remove the struggling would-be ticket-dodger from the arena. That, we say, is the last of the chump from Calcutta.

How little we appreciate the 'go getter' spirit of the huge bulk from Bengal.

A few moments afterwards he arrives again to try another plan. Foiled at the legitimate entrance he tackles the bars. The hopeless case of the camel and the needle's eye is again enacted. He gets his fat head through—and then sticks!

Realizing his predicament, he bellows like a lassoed bull and wildly throws his body about in an effort to dislodge himself. What with his fright, his yelling, and the spasmodic heavings of his fat bulk, it looks as if he will burst either himself or the bars. The sheep-like crowd huddled inside the pen observe with mild incurious eyes, or totally ignore his alarming appearance. A sudden case of swift sickness amongst the checked pilgrims temporarily claims our attention.

When we turn to attempt to loosen the pop-eyed hysterical clown who tried to steal in through the side entrance, we are too late. At the moment our eyes pick him up again through the moving panorama of shifting folk, they also alight on the blue-pugried khaki-clad form of a native constable.

As we look the comedy ends.

THE WHEELS OF IND

The stalwart policeman pauses in his patrol down the inside of the bars and in a nonchalant, matter-of-fact manner brings his heavy staff thwack on to the shaven crown of the pilloried contortionist, who falls out backwards for the count, all thoughts of tickets, trains and even Jagannath himself smothered in an all-embracing unconsciousness.

Under the reeking flare of open lights, or swimming in a sea of silver, time and again we wade into the pens, amid a struggling weak-kneed mass of clamouring, sweating, gesticulating humanity, dazed and dulled by the strangeness all around. Huddled and herded, shepherded and shoved, they display at times a meekness which fills one with contempt and at others a stupidity which amazes.

We cleave through groups of sheep to separate two surprisingly bloodthirsty antagonists and part the brace of warriors to the far corners of the cage. We investigate alleged robberies and rascalities, more often than not retiring from the fray more muddled than when we started. Now and then we ginger up baffled bewildered folk who refuse to move when the train arrives or restrain the impetuous violence of more energetic persons who feel they have sojourned too long.

With camphor slung round our necks and disinfected clothes we rub shoulders with nearly every contagion known or unknown to medical science and when opportunity offers plunge into carbolic baths.

Special after special leaves with its load of happy ambition-satisfied pilgrims still supremely elated, whilst the reservoir of the giant cages at the South end of the platform slowly fills again with the pourings still to go.

All through the night they pass through the steel-

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

barred pens. All through the fire-fly spangled dark the specials roll away.

The dawning East pales to luminous lemon, and purply dark the wheel of Vishnu looms in the growing light. Night and its attendant stars 'like drunkards reel across the hills': a brief quiescence: up shoots the sun and it is day.

Clear cut against the azure morning the immobile symbol looks down on the moving wheels of steam.

As the early trains slowly draw away through the warming day, carrying their human freight to all parts of the land, the western windows crowd again and shine once more with the happy faces of the faithful. Each pair of eyes, some drowsy with drugs, most heavy with sleep, take a last long glimpse at the sacred shape. The wheel far up above them they piously adore. The wheels just underneath them they definitely ignore.

The same low passionless cry which carried them in bears them away on wings of sound.

Click, click goes each tongue against each cheek, wide open goes each eye. They feast their fill of the divine emblem and with a uniformity that startles and a ring of sound that thrills they hurl their challenge to the skies:

"Jai Jagannath ki Jai."

Their brethren, still caged and shut off from the sight of the wheel, catch the murmur from the train. They rouse from their apathy and rise from their ease, to mutter mechanically in unison with the freemen speeding North the war-cry of their Lord. The sound springs from the earth, it drips from the drooping trees, it hums and whispers all around till the world seems all aflood. Again and again, rising and falling like a sea of song, the irresistible flow of the age-long cry shatters the peace of the morning.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Standing on the Puri platform we watch the departing trains. Over and over again we see the crowds, the same yet different, swarm the carriage doors, to sort themselves out in that strange self-classifying way so peculiar to the East.

Sated by now with the sound of the eternal chorus, but admiring ever the piety of the simple shouting souls, we listen unmoved to the triumphant roar, "Hail! hail! O Lord of the World!" whilst the rolling wheels of Vishnu echo their parting cry. We think instead of the benefits which these same rumbling wheels have brought these dark-skinned children: cessation of famine, a slow beginning of liberation from serfdom and slavery to freedom and peace; the exploitation of the industrial and commercial resources of India and the provision of markets for her produce and employments for her peoples. These same folk on religion, pleasure or business bent are flung from Duzdap to Tinsukia, from Tuticorin to Peshawar in but a fraction of the time of pre-rail-road days.

On November 5th, 1932, a special pilgrim train left Howrah Station, Calcutta, to visit the majority of the most sacred spots of the Hindu faith. The fortunate ones, who thus encompassed in the space of a few weeks what would formerly have taken a lifetime, lived and slept in the train. In a great sweep, South, West, North, East and South again they rolled from shrine to shrine gathering merit and absolution at each move of the wheels.

Puri, Godavari, Madras, Arkonam, Conjeevaram, Rameshwaram, Chingleput, Chidambaram, Kumbakonam, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madura, Tirupathi, Renigunta, Poona, Nasik, Bombay, Dwarka, Baroda, Dakor, Ahmedabad, Junagad, Jamnagar, Abu Road, Ajmer, Chittorgargh, Nathdwara, Ujjain, Agra, Muttra,

KHURDA ROAD—GODS ON WHEELS

Delhi, Kurukshetra, Amritsar, Lahore, Hardwar, Benares, Ajodhya, Allahabad, Gaya, Baijnathdham, and so on back home again to Calcutta.

They saw and worshipped at them all. What an orgy of adoration ! An age of pious pilgrimage concentrated into a negligible space of time, made possible only by the rails of steel and the wheels that roll along them.

The luxurious expresses and mammoth freight trains speeding to every corner of the vast area open up new vistas of hope for all. The whirling wheels revolve in a ceaseless revolution of commercial, social and spiritual emancipation.

Do the unlearned, unlettered, inarticulate mass appreciate the many wonders of the wheel ? It is to be feared not. Many of those who profess to voice the aspirations of India's peoples oft-times unreasonably reject or biasedly ignore its manifold blessings.

Standing then on the Puri platform almost under the shadow of the ancient symbol, listening still to the age-old challenge, we feel that these thanksgiving children, perhaps with less reverence but with greater truth, could cry, "*Jai Charka ki Jai*," which, interpreted, might read, "Hail ! thou Wheel ! Lord of the Earth !"



In some drowsy sun-baked village the elders squat round the sacred tree. The pungent evening fires swirl lazily to the sky. The droning hum of beetles and the eerie noises of the night fold around them.

The little group listens entranced as the returned wanderer tells them of the wonders seen at Puri and of the triumphal progress of its Gods. Wide-eyed they sit, drinking in the simple story of the local Marco Polo.

THE WHEELS OF IND

Far away in the night comes the rumble of the whirling wheels of a West-bound Bengal-Nagpur freight train as it hurtles through the starry dark.

An association of ideas strikes a responsive chord in the rural recorder.

In tones vibrant with reverent piety and simple faith he murmurs the sacred phrase again and the humble group around him roll the slogan round and round :

"Jai Jagannath ki Jai"—"Hail ! O Lord of the World ! Hail !"

Listen again through the straining stirring night, you little band of India's peasant millions. Listen again to the rolling wheels, the mighty moving messengers of that sacred shape on the fane at Puri.

The roaring wheels fade into the distance, but now and then some rocky defile or smooth-banked cutting sends the sound back to the waiting ears. The rhythm is still the same, a message to these village folk, *Jai-jai-charka-ki-jai-jai-jai-charka-ki-jai-jai-jai-charka-ki-jai*. Hail ! hail ! hail ! to the Wheel ! Lord of the Earth !